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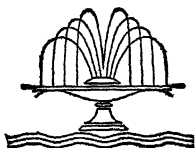
D. N. PRAKASH, *Sqn.-Leader,*
Dy. Military Secy. to the Governor-General.

MEN OF ACTION

MEN OF ACTION

by
COMMANDER
KENNETH EDWARDS
ROYAL NAVY

With 20 Reproductions of Paintings
by DOUGLAS WALES
(CAPTAIN DOUGLAS WALES SMITH R.N.)



Collins
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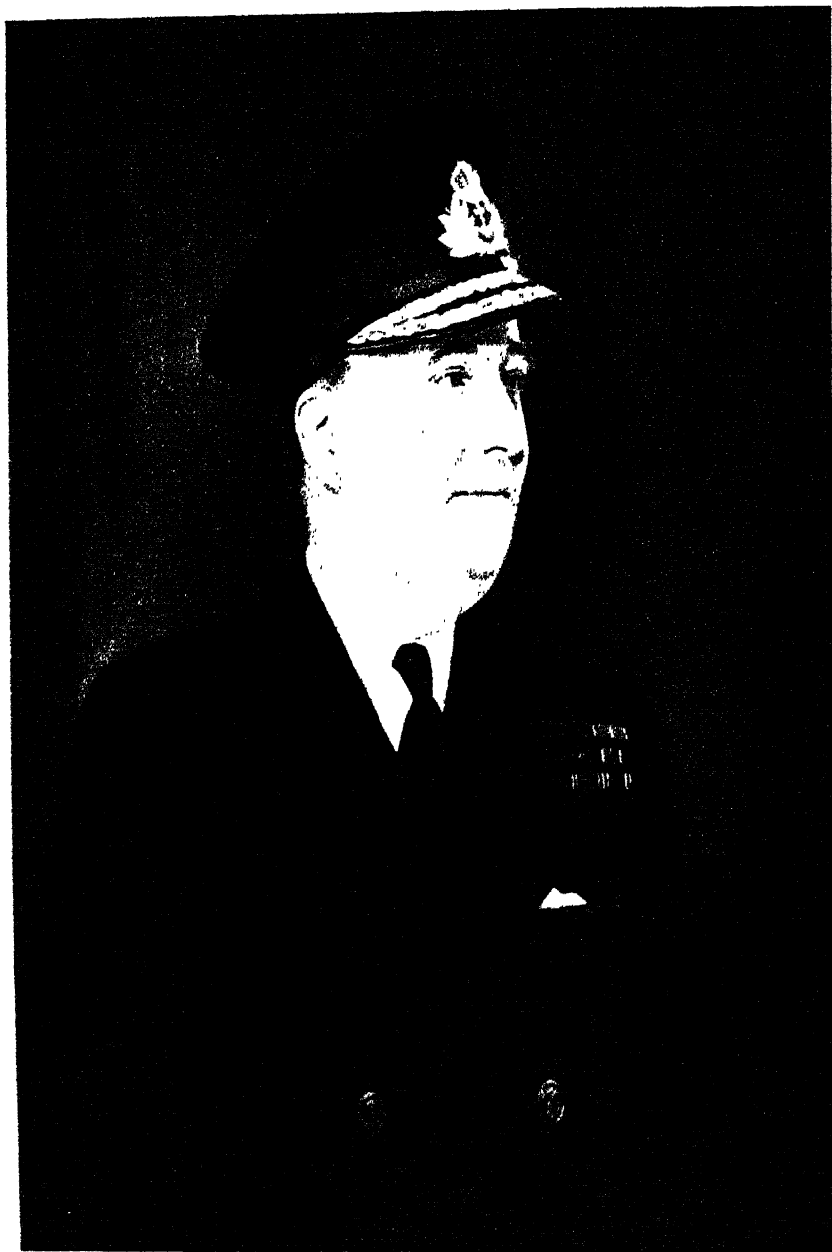
"To all who serve with them."

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Rear-Admiral R. L. Burnett

ROBERT LINDSAY BURNETT

C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E.

Rear-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

IT is a traditional ceremony in the Royal Navy that when commanding officers and flag officers come on board a warship they do so to the trilling of bos'n's pipes. This ceremony of "piping the side" is a survival of the days when senior officers were hoisted on board in a bos'n's chair at the end of a rope or "whip" led through a block at the yard arm. The "pipe" was the order to "hoist away."

Tens of thousands of naval officers have been honoured in the traditional way as they have stepped up the gangway on to the quarter-deck, but only one has been so honoured while being actually hoisted on board in a bos'n's chair at sea in wartime. That officer is Rear-Admiral Robert Lindsay Burnett.

The incident happened in far northern waters, when circumstances made it necessary for Rear-Admiral Burnett to transfer his flag from the light cruiser *Scylla* to the destroyer *Milne*. The weather was too bad for the ships to lie alongside one another and Rear-Admiral Burnett climbed into a bos'n's chair (which is merely a wooden seat like that of a swing or the rung of a rope ladder), hooked on to the wire of the *Scylla's* aircraft crane. With this he was hoisted off the cruiser's deck, swung outboard across the tumbling water between the two ships, and lowered on to the deck of the *Milne*. As he swung over to the destroyer six seamen stood up in the whaler at the davit-heads and "piped" the Admiral on board. As he landed on the deck his Rear-Admiral's flag broke at the destroyer's mast-head.

The men who enacted this little ceremony had been fighting for several days and nights, running a convoy to north Russia through the worst that the U-boats and the Luftwaffe could do. It has been said that tradition dies hard. In the Royal Navy the best of tradition never dies.

"Bob" Burnett, he is called in the Navy. He is of medium height, thick-set, with fair hair and what might be termed a "ruddy" complexion, and an ever-ready laugh. Had the sobriquet not already

been applied to another naval officer, there is no doubt that he would have been known as "the jolly sailor."

Like so many of the men who have distinguished themselves in this war, "Bob" Burnett is a small-ship officer. At the beginning of the last war he was First Lieutenant of the destroyer *Laertes*, in the Harwich Force. On the very first day of hostilities he was in action, when the German minelayer *Konigin Luise* was sunk in the North Sea. At the Battle of the Heligoland Bight the *Laertes* was hit and put out of action by the German cruiser *Mainz* at the very moment that the *Laertes* torpedoed the *Mainz*. The *Laertes* had to be towed back across the North Sea, but while in tow her crew patched up her damaged boilers and succeeded in raising steam. There are many who allege that the *Laertes* deliberately parted the tow in order to avoid being ignominiously "lugged into harbour at the end of a string."

The *Laertes* was also present at the Battle of the Dogger Bank, during which she picked up many of the survivors from the sunken German cruiser *Blucher*.

In February, 1915, Burnett got his first command. This was the tiny Torpedo-boat No. 26. He was then twenty-seven years of age and was a lieutenant of rather less than five years' seniority. Of one of his exploits in this craft, "Bob" Burnett has a unique photographic record. It is entitled "Alone I Did It" and illustrates the story of "an overland journey which T.B. No. 26 did as a result of a navigational error. He says that he keeps it as a reminder that even in the olden days he was not entirely free from human error. The eyes of many young officers have wandered to that picture for comfort when they have been "on the mat" in Burnett's cabin!

For the rest of the 1914-18 war Burnett commanded destroyers—*Paisley*, *Acheron*, *Nessus* and *Scotsman*—mostly with the Grand Fleet, but he also had experience in the Western Approaches and in the Dover Patrol.

Shortly before the Armistice Burnett was taken from sea appointments to help reorganise the Physical Training branch of the Navy, and after two years at Portsmouth, he spent the next three years on the staff of Admiral Sir John de Robeck, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, as the first Fleet Recreational Officer in either the Mediterranean or Atlantic Fleets.

Burnett went back to destroyers in 1931 as a young captain. He then took command of the 8th Destroyer Flotilla on the China

Station, where his ships spent the greater part of their time on anti-piracy patrols.

As a senior captain, he was Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks at Chatham, where he had the arduous task of mobilising the personnel of the East country manning port for war. He hoisted his flag as an Acting Rear-Admiral in December, 1940, and in March, 1942, he was appointed Rear-Admiral Commanding the destroyer flotillas of the Home Fleet.

Sport and physical training are his passions. He is a "springer," as the Navy calls those who have specialised in physical and recreational training, and has been Director of Physical Training and Secretary of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Sports Control Board. As such he has probably done more than any other officer for the sport and physical training of the Service. Nor has his concern with athletics been purely administrative. He has held the sabre championship at the Royal Tournament and is a very keen fencer and boxer. He tells a story of his final appearance in the ring, when, at the age of thirty-two, he took a stone and a half and a grand hiding from the great Jim Driscoll in a three-round alleged exhibition contest.

Besides adjudicating at the English Fencing Championships, he has refereed much first-class Rugby Football and Boxing. On occasions he has occupied the Chair at the old National Sporting Club and at the Albert Hall, but the greatest pleasure he got was in officiating at the meetings of the East End boys' clubs. He is also a qualified referee for association football, hockey and water polo.

Having, during a considerable part of his career, looked upon games as his work—albeit a most pleasant form of work—one of his greatest recreations was, in peace time, theatrical production. Many naval officers and ratings, and some fortunate others, remember with delight those striking musical comedies which "Bob" Burnett produced when he was Second-in-Command of the battleship *Rodney*.

In the present war Rear-Admiral Burnett will be remembered as the man who fought the greatest Allied convoy through to north Russia against prolonged and determined attacks by U-boats and aircraft.

The big convoy was sighted by enemy aircraft and by U-boats on September 9th, 1942, when it was north-east of Iceland, and still out of attacking range of the enemy's air bases in northern Norway.

Burnett expected attacks by numbers of U-boats to begin almost at once, but these did not materialise. It may be that the reason for this immunity is to be found in the Admiralty communique describing the passage of this convoy. The communique stated that: "In this early stage one U-boat was attacked and probably seriously damaged."

It is well known that the British Admiralty errs on the side of caution in assessing the results of attacks on U-boats, demanding absolute proof of destruction before admitting that a U-boat has been more than "probably damaged." If the U-boat attacked was the one which had reported the convoy, and the only U-boat in the vicinity, as might well have been the case if it was outward or homeward bound by the usual northern route, and if that U-boat was sunk, it would account for the immunity of the convoy from U-boat attack for three days after it had first been sighted.

Rear-Admiral Burnett, commanding the convoy escort, with his flag flying in the light cruiser *Scylla*, could in any case not afford to relax his vigilance. He was well aware that he had had bad luck in being sighted so early in the voyage, and that this would give the enemy plenty of time to prepare a very hot reception for the convoy, particularly when it had to pass through the channel between northern Norway and the edge of the Arctic ice pack, in almost perpetual daylight, with the enemy's air bases close along the flank of its route, and with insufficient sea-room to enable effective evading action to be taken. Burnett's expectations were to be fully realised.

On September 12th the convoy was again sighted by enemy aircraft. This time it was near enough to the enemy's bases to allow the aircraft to shadow the convoy. Moreover, the "groping finger" of the Asdic had detected U-boats. It was soon clear that there was a pack of U-boats in the vicinity of the convoy, for destroyer after destroyer screening the convoy detected U-boats and attacked them with depth charges. The escorts had to work hard and fast, but they worked effectively. The U-boats did not score the successes which the German High Command expected of them, to judge by the claims they made, and it seems more than likely that some of the U-boats were either destroyed, or retired from the fray damaged and with crews badly shaken.

Next day was the 13th. It was the day on which took place the most concentrated attack on a convoy which has been delivered in

the whole course of the war. There were losses among the attackers and among the ships in convoy, but the bulk of the convoy sailed on, and that was a measure of the German failure.

The Germans used U-boats and aircraft in these attacks, the latter aiming both bombs and torpedoes at the convoy. They also tried a new technique. Seeing that the convoy was close to the edge of the Arctic ice pack and therefore had scant space in which to manœuvre, they used aircraft to drop mines ahead of the convoy.

One can well imagine that Rear-Admiral Burnett had his hands full in dealing with all these varied forms of attack. He had stationed the *Scylla* almost in the centre of the convoy, where the concentrated fire of her anti-aircraft guns would afford the maximum protection to the ships in convoy, irrespective of the direction from which the enemy attacked. Around the fringes of the convoy was stationed the largest destroyer escort given to any convoy. In the vicinity was an aircraft carrier, carrying Sea-Hurricane fighters for the discomfiture of the Luftwaffe.

The first air attack of the day was made by half a dozen bombers. They were chary of approaching close to the British guns and dropped their bombs—harmlessly—from a great height through gaps in the clouds.

The next attack was far more serious.

"Large group of enemy aircraft approaching on the starboard bow," came the warning signal.

It was a large group. On the bridge of the *Scylla* they counted forty-two of them—all Junkers 88 or Heinkel 111, each aircraft carrying two torpedoes—that meant at least eighty-four torpedoes. They came into the attack almost at sea level, and as they came within range every gun in the convoy and the escort ships opened fire. The *Scylla's* long-range guns were soon joined by the destroyer's main armaments. Then the shorter range quick-firing weapons came into action—pom-poms, Oerlikons, Bren guns, and multiple machine-guns all added to the inferno of din.

Aircraft were hit ; aircraft crashed ; but still some came on, and in a moment they were weaving about among the ships, some flying at mast height and some even below deck level. From the flag-deck of the *Scylla* an observer found himself actually looking down on Heinkels and Junkers.

Finding the barrage too hot, many of the German aircraft zoomed up, trying to gain cloud cover and get free of that part of

the air which was so full of flying metal and explosive. When they did so they met the Sea-Hurricanes from the carrier. In a moment the air below the cloud ceiling, above the clouds, and in gaps in the clouds, was full of aircraft twisting and turning in combat.

With so much happening at once and so fast, nobody had time to keep accurate count of the enemy aircraft shot down or damaged. On one bow could be seen a streak of flame and smoke as a German aircraft took its last dive; on the other side there was a great splash, and when the spray cleared the Swastika-marked tail of an aircraft could be seen sticking out of the water like a crazy pagan tombstone.

Rear-Admiral Burnett certainly had no time to assess the extent of the mauling which the attackers had received. It was inevitable, with so many torpedoes dropped, that some should find their marks, and he was concerned solely with the safety of the merchant ships consigned to his charge for this most dangerous of all voyages. There were survivors to be picked up, and picked up quickly from the icy Arctic waters if they were to survive. A quick and correct decision had to be made of what to do with a merchant ship which was damaged so that she could no longer maintain the speed of the convoy. There were those mines which had been sown by aircraft ahead of the convoy to be plotted and avoided. And all the time there was the certainty of renewed heavy attacks, both by aircraft and U-boats.

He had not long to wait for the next attack, but it was nothing like as strong as that which the convoy and its escorts had already sustained—testimony, perhaps, that the first attackers had suffered more loss than Burnett knew. Moreover, while the courage and determination of the German pilots in the first big torpedo attack proclaimed them the “first eleven”; by comparison, the pilots of the aircraft in this afternoon attack were definitely “second eleven.”

There were nine torpedo-carrying aircraft in this attack—eighteen torpedoes—and every one of those torpedoes was dropped at long range. Not one hit a ship. The naval fighter aircraft broke up the enemy formation, and the barrage proved too hot for them to penetrate. Two enemy aircraft were seen to crash into the sea, and others were certainly badly damaged. The convoy and its escorts sailed on.

At dusk there came the fourth air attack of the day. Again they

were torpedo-bombers—a dozen of them this time, carrying twenty-four torpedoes.

Again the Sea-Hurricanes from the carrier sailed in among them, breaking up their formations and giving them plenty to think about apart from their attacks. Again the guns of the ships in convoy and of their escorts pumped out thousands of shells and bullets in a terrific barrage. And again the combined efforts of the fighters and the guns frustrated the attack, forcing the enemy pilots to drop their torpedoes at long range and devote all their faculties to trying to escape from the aerial maelstrom. Six out of those twelve German torpedo-bombers failed to escape and were seen to crash. Others were damaged.

The short Arctic night, which was merely twilight, gave all too brief respite to men who had been in action almost continuously through the long day, but they were sustained by the knowledge that they had withstood the largest and most determined air attack ever delivered, and had beaten off all attacks, inflicting considerable loss on the enemy. At least thirteen enemy aircraft had been seen to crash, and it seemed likely that many others would take no further part in operations.

Rear-Admiral Burnett looked with some pardonable pride at the convoy. One long fierce day had passed, and the great majority of the ships of the largest convoy ever consigned to north Russia were still steaming imperturbably towards Murmansk. There would be other days, rather longer and probably as fierce, before the convoy could be delivered to its destination, but that first day somehow gave him confidence for the future.

At dawn next morning—September 14th—the enemy returned to the attack. This time he sent in his U-boats—a big pack of them. Instead of the air around the convoy being torn with shells, the water around it was humped into hillocks by the deep explosions of depth charges. Several U-boats were attacked. How many were sunk and how many damaged will not be known until the enemy's records come to be examined after the war. One was certainly sunk. The depth charge explosions brought to the surface a quantity of oil and bubbles. These in themselves would have been regarded only as an indication of having "worried" the U-boat, since a submarine can emit oil and bubbles at will without being damaged. There came to the surface other things, however, and these gave proof to conjecture—the wreckage of wooden

gratings, green vegetables held in readiness for the next few meals.

Only in the years to come will it be possible to assess the full results of this concentrated U-boat attack. At present, apart from the "green veg. U-boat," one can only give the official Admiralty assessment that "two U-boats were almost certainly sunk and four others probably seriously damaged" during the whole operation. There is not an officer or man who served in that convoy or its escort who would not swear that no estimate has ever been so conservative.

The Germans left the U-boats a free hand during the forenoon, and apparently held off their aircraft for fear of confusing the U-boat commanders. This, it may be noted in parenthesis, was in sharp contrast to British practice in the central Mediterranean, where air and submarine attacks were frequently synchronised to the greater discomfiture of the enemy.

As it was, no air attack developed until afternoon. Then twenty-two torpedo-carrying aircraft came in to attack. This attack was significant, and a tribute to the work of the Sea-Hurricanes from the aircraft carrier. The German pilots clearly thought that they could not hope to attack the convoy successfully until the aircraft carrier had been disposed of. They concentrated on her, but she came safely through, and her commanding officer made a signal to Rear-Admiral Burnett: "Have had the honour of being the sole object of attack." That signal reflected the spirit of the whole force under Burnett's command.

The Luftwaffe, however, was far from having shot its bolt, and its task was now easier since the convoy was, unavoidably, closer to the aerodromes in northern Norway. Shortly after the concentrated attack on the aircraft carrier, a dozen bombers appeared and bombed the convoy systematically but ineffectually from a great height. This attack was slow in developing and deliberate in character, the aircraft waiting for and taking advantage of gaps in the clouds. It lasted for an hour and a quarter, but the only success the enemy gained was the exasperation of the anti-aircraft gun crews with the cloud conditions.

The gunners of the convoy and its escorts soon had plenty to do, however, for the high-level bombing attack was followed almost immediately by an attack by twenty-five torpedo bombers. The Sea-Hurricanes, which had been chasing the high-level bombers

above the clouds, dived down to intercept, and once again they broke up the German formations and then left their final discomfiture to the anti-aircraft guns. The combination of fighters and guns proved effective. The attack was broken up and driven off.

This torpedo attack developed before the high-level bombing had ceased, and naval fighters from the carrier were at one time in combat both above and below the cloud ceiling. In their fighting they exhibited sublime indifference to everything except the destruction of the enemy, and in their combats in the air they frequently chased a damaged German aircraft through the terrific barrage put up by the ships.

Rear-Admiral Burnett reported officially: "I shall never forget the reckless gallantry of the naval fighter pilots in their determination to get in among the enemy, despite the solid mass of our defensive fire of every type."

That day high-level bombing had been succeeded by attack by torpedo-carrying aircraft; and then bombers again tried their hands. They achieved nothing but expenditure of their own material and loss of their own aircraft.

The second fierce day closed with a score of at least one U-boat certainly destroyed, a minimum of twenty-four German aircraft certainly shot down, and many others badly damaged.

As dusk fell "Bob" Burnett and his men could again look at the great convoy forging on towards Murmansk and feel both pride and relief in their hearts. The enemy had thrown in all he had, but had achieved nothing but loss to himself.

Tired men and a tired Admiral could not afford the luxury of rest. The Arctic night, amounting only to a couple of hours of twilight, gave all too brief respite.

No sooner was it fully light on September 15th than the enemy air attacks started again. Between fifty and seventy aircraft were sent in to carry out high-level and dive-bombing attacks. It was a large force of aircraft, but it contained no torpedo-carrying planes. It seemed as if the enemy had shot at least one of his bolts.

The defence of the convoy during these bombing attacks was hampered by low clouds, but the enemy aircraft certainly did not have things all their own way. Above the clouds they were set upon by the Sea-Hurricanes from the much-attacked but undamaged carrier, and every time they showed themselves below the cloud

ceiling they were met by a most intense anti-aircraft fire from the ships.

This air attack lasted some time, but it was finally beaten off. It was far from being the only preoccupation of the Admiral in charge. The German High Command, as if in desperation, had again sent their U-boats in to the attack.

This U-boat attack, however, met with no more success than the air attacks which immediately preceded it. Destroyers attacked several U-boats with depth charges, and one of these attacks seemed conclusive, in that it brought wreckage as well as oil and bubbles of air to the surface.

There was only one more attack on the convoy. This was carried out by twenty-four dive-bombers shortly before the convoy got in to Murmansk. Again it was unsuccessful and cost the enemy losses, two aircraft being certainly shot down.

So the biggest convoy reached Russia after fighting its way day after day through a succession of the most formidable attacks which the enemy could mount. The products of the arms factories of Britain and the United States were carried to our Allies by the devotion and determination of the crews of the ships in convoy and their escorts.

In February, 1943, it was officially announced that, up to the end of 1942, 6,714 tanks, more than 15,600 aircraft, 85,000 trucks, 70,000,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition, and hundreds of thousands of tons of other supplies had been sent to Russia. A goodly proportion of this large-scale aid had been conveyed in the convoy which Rear-Admiral Burnett saw through. There had been losses in the convoy; it was inevitable that there should be, with the enemy attacking on such a scale for so long a period. The losses, however, were far less than might have been expected, and they certainly bore no relation to the statements of the German High Command, which boasted that thirty-eight out of forty-eight ships in the convoy had been sunk, and also six naval vessels of the convoy escort. In point of fact, no escort ship had been lost. Four of our naval aircraft were lost, but three of their pilots were saved.

On the credit side, apart from the delivery of large quantities of vital war materials to Russia, could be counted at least forty German aircraft certainly destroyed and many more damaged. There was also that conservative Admiralty assessment of successes

against U-boats—"two U-boats almost certainly sunk and four others seriously damaged."

There were two other big items to put on the credit side. One was the prodigal German expenditure of valuable torpedoes, and the other the results of the mauling which the Luftwaffe had received at the hands of "Bob" Burnett's ships.

In the attacks on that convoy the enemy used 110 torpedo-bombers, each carrying two torpedoes. The Germans therefore squandered 220 valuable torpedoes, to say nothing of the bomb loads of nearly 150 aircraft, with a very small return. The massing of these heavy weapons in the far north of Norway, where there are neither railways nor roads, must have strained the German transport organisation as well as their production. Experience was to show that the enemy had either expended his bombs and torpedoes or that his air forces in northern Norway had suffered so much loss and damage as to be virtually out of operation. At all events, the return convoy was not attacked from the air, although it must have presented a tempting target as it passed within easy range of the German air bases. Moreover, the Germans never again utilised such formidable forces against our north Russian convoys. In this way Burnett's convoy tempered the wind for its successors.

Rear-Admiral Burnett's work was by no means over when he delivered the merchant ships of the eastbound convoy to Murmansk. He had to turn round and escort a homeward-bound convoy back to the British Isles. It was a grim prospect, having to escort ships in ballast through those same waters just after having been given so vivid a demonstration of the attacking forces at the disposal of the enemy.

In the event, however, the Luftwaffe seemed to have had enough and did not molest the homeward-bound convoy at all. A number of U-boats did attack—and were promptly and effectively counter-attacked with depth charges. It was again a case of intense and unending vigilance for all concerned, but on the whole the homeward voyage proved an anti-climax.

The escort, however, lost two ships, the minesweeper H.M.S. *Leda* and the destroyer H.M.S. *Somali*. The loss of the latter ship was a bitter disappointment after a prolonged attempt to save her and get her to port where her injuries could be repaired. For more than three days the crippled *Somali* was towed by another destroyer, and all the time the weather was deteriorating. Then, in the early

hours of the fourth day, the sea rose suddenly and the *Somali* broke in two and sank. A magnificent feat of seamanship deserved a better reward, but fortunately the casualties were light.

It was just after the "turn round" of the escorting forces after delivering the outward convoy and picking up the homeward-bound ships that "Bob" Burnett transferred his flag from the *Scylla* to a destroyer, being hoisted from one ship to another by crane. The *Scylla* had on board a number of survivors from ships sunk in the outward-bound convoy. Many of these were injured and suffering from immersion in the Arctic ocean, and needed more medical attention than could be given on board the light cruiser. It was therefore decided that the *Scylla* should not linger with the convoy, but go ahead at high speed to land the injured at the earliest possible moment. Rear-Admiral Burnett, of course, stayed with the convoy, and was therefore transferred from the *Scylla* to the destroyer *Milne*.

When "Bob" Burnett got back to Great Britain from this double convoy operation he turned to a man who had been with him on the bridge of the *Scylla* during some of the fiercest enemy attacks. "Well, were you frightened?" he asked.

"Yes, very, sometimes," he answered.

Burnett's remark was characteristic. "So was I," he said, "very. And any man who says he was not is a B.F." There is no nonsense about "Bob" Burnett.

For that convoy operation Rear-Admiral Burnett was created a C.B. The running of this convoy to north Russia was not the only operation which Rear-Admiral Burnett conducted in his capacity as Rear-Admiral commanding the Home Fleet Destroyer Flotillas, and in March, 1943, he was awarded the D.S.O. for bravery and skill in another operation in northern waters, but that is a story which cannot yet be told.

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SIR HAROLD MARTIN BURROUGH

K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.

Vice-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

THERE is only one way of describing Admiral Burrough. That is not by stringing adjectives together, but by dressing him up. Put him into breeches and gaiters: give him side-whiskers and a flat top-hat: increase his girth: and you have—John Bull.

Nor is the likeness purely physical. The naval operations which have been led by Burrough have been, to say the least of it, tricky: the Vaagso Raid, the most vital of the Malta convoys, and the Allied landing at Algiers. They have shown that Harold Burrough has the steadfastness of John Bull. He also has the kindliness and the twinkling humour. Moreover, he has deeply rooted in his character an intense idealism—the same type of idealism which, misunderstood by foreigners, makes John Bull's actions unpredictable to the Latin and the Teuton and has led to the sobriquet of “perfidie Albion.” Burrough is the last man in the world to preach about it, but he believes passionately that this war is being fought not only to purge the world from the Beasts, but also to set up a new world dominated by the spirit of service that he has found among the men with whom he has worked and fought. He holds that in that spirit of service lies the hope of the world—and who shall say that he is not right?

This spirit of service may be more obvious to Burrough than to some other men, simply because it is so strong in him. For that very reason, he inspires it in others. He is essentially a leader. When, during the great Malta convoy action, he was forced to leave his flagship because she was damaged and could not continue with the convoy, Admiral Burrough leant over the bridge of the stricken ship and said to the men assembled on her listing decks: “I hate to leave you like this, but my job is to get the convoy through to Malta, and I'm going to do that whatever happens. Unfortunately I can obviously no longer do it from this ship.”

From the decks came shouts of men volunteering to go with their admiral into the most dangerous waters in the world, but

Burrough shook his head. "No," he said, "your job is to stop here and get your ship safely home."

"Don't worry, sir," shouted the seamen. "We've been with you in her for two years now, and we're not going to let her go."

They didn't. The cruiser got safely back to harbour, and Admiral Burrough took the convoy on to Malta, heartened in his hours of trial by that little demonstration of friendship and confidence from the men of his flagship.

Burrough, who first went to sea as a midshipman on 30th September, 1904, was a gunnery specialist. Two years before the war he reached what is commonly regarded as the peak of a naval gunnery officer's career—the command of H.M.S. *Excellent*, the gunnery school at Whale Island, Portsmouth. Then he was Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty for a time, before hoisting his flag in command of one of the cruiser squadrons of the Home Fleet.

It was just before the late dawn of a northern winter day—the 27th of December, 1941—that H.M.S. *Kenya*, flying his flag, led a diverse collection of ships into the calm waters of a Norwegian fiord. On the bridge of the *Kenya* stood Rear-Admiral Burrough, and beside him stood Brigadier (now Major-General) J. C. Haydon, D.S.O., of the Irish Guards. They were conducting what was, up to that time, the largest combined operation of the war, and which will go down to history as the Vaagso Raid.

It was an eerie and dangerous business, leading the expedition into the narrow fiord. Surprise is everything in a raid of this sort, but how long could the ships hope to be undetected on their passage up the fiord? The peaceful calm of the fiord made absolute silence essential. Nor could the natural desire for haste be allowed to prevail, for the wake and wash of a ship at speed would at once have given them away. It was a case for self-discipline, made the more difficult because of the sharp contrast between the very rough passage of the North Sea in a full gale and the oppressive calm of the fiord.

An officer who was on the bridge of the *Kenya* has said: "It was a very eerie sensation entering the fiord in absolute silence and very slowly. I wondered what was going to happen, for it seemed that the ship had lost her proper element; that she was no longer a free ship at sea."

Astern of the *Kenya* followed the infantry landing ships, carrying

the troops and with the landing craft hanging at their davits. These were closely guarded by destroyers.

This force was steaming up Vaags Fiord, south of Stadtlandet, the prominent peninsular on the south-west coast of Norway. Vaags Fiord runs into Ulvesund, a narrow but deep navigational channel between the mainland and the large off-lying island of Vaagso. This channel is but a part of what is known to British seamen as the Inner Leads, and to Norwegians as the Indreled. By using this channel shipping can travel almost the whole length of the Norwegian coast without emerging into the open sea—an important consideration when one bears in mind the minefields and the activities of the British submarines off that coast. There are, however, a few places where shipping must come out into the open. One is in order to round the peninsular of Stadtlandet, just north of Vaagso. This geographical feature meant that there was a tendency for shipping to congregate in Ulvesund, waiting there for a favourable opportunity to run the gauntlet of the "Stadtlandet corner."

This shipping, together with various military and industrial works in and about the town of South Vaagso and on the neighbouring small islands, were the objectives of the raid.

Vaags Fiord runs into Ulversund almost at right angles, and where the two waterways meet lies the small island of Maaloy. From the purely navigational point of view, it is an unpleasant place into which to lead unlighted ships on a dark night, and it was known that the Germans had placed considerable coastal fortifications in the area. A coast defence battery had been mounted on the small island of Maaloy, and this dominated the junction of Vaags Fiord and Ulversund. Four miles to the southward there was a battery of fairly heavy guns on the island of Rugsundo. This battery was so arranged that it could fire westwards down Vaags Fiord. There were other defences in and around the town of South Vaagso.

It will be seen that Admiral Burrough's initial task of getting the force to the right place at the right time without being discovered by the enemy was one of great difficulty and anxiety. In this case time was as important as place, for the landing operations were carefully synchronised with an air attack. In the event, Admiral Burrough's force arrived at the appointed place exactly one minute late—after a sixteen-hour passage of the North Sea, the first part of which had been in the tail end of a gale.

Nor did Admiral Burrough's responsibility end with the delivery of the force in Vaags Fiord at eight o'clock on the morning of December 27th. The plan provided for the knocking out of the German batteries, and particularly that on Maaloy Island, by gun-fire from the warships. If this was not done there would be heavy loss, not only among the warships, but among the infantry landing ships and the troops which they carried. Moreover, the task of dealing with any shipping found in the fiords was a naval responsibility. And finally, Admiral Burrough had to embark the troops, extricate the force, and make the return passage of the North Sea. This last after the alarm had been raised and when it was to be expected that the Germans would try desperately to intercept the force by aircraft, with U-boats, and any other means at their disposal.

The first guns were fired at 8.48 a.m. H.M.S. *Kenya* began by firing starshell which lit up the island of Maaloy and its battery. Then the *Kenya* and the destroyers opened fire in earnest. The naval bombardment of Maaloy lasted nine and a quarter minutes. In that time between five and six hundred six-inch shells from the *Kenya* fell upon a space not more than 250 yards square, and to this weight of metal must be added hundreds of shells from the destroyers. Then the naval bombardment of Maaloy ceased abruptly, and the other Services took a hand. Bombers of the Royal Air Force roared in to the attack. Then they dropped smoke bombs, behind which the Commandos landed and stormed the island. Maaloy and its garrison of Germans were quickly accounted for.

At 8.56 a.m., just before the naval bombardment of Maaloy ceased, the heavy gun battery on Rugsundo Island opened fire on the *Kenya*. The battery had already been bombed, but this had not put the guns out of action as had been hoped. Two minutes later the *Kenya* ceased her bombardment of Maaloy and opened fire on the Rugsundo battery. Within two and a half minutes that battery was silenced. It was pretty shooting by a ship wearing the flag of a gunnery specialist.

The *Kenya's* duel with the Rugsundo battery was, however, by no means over. The Germans apparently worked feverishly to get their guns back into action, and some guns of the battery opened fire more than once later in the day. Twice these scored hits on the *Kenya*. One shell holed the ship above the water-line abreast the bridge. The other did only superficial damage. Each time the



Vice-Admiral Sir H. M. Burrough

Rugsundo battery opened fire it was again silenced by the guns of the *Kenya*, and was finally knocked out at 1.17 p.m.

Meanwhile the destroyers *Onslow* and *Oribi* had passed through the narrows between Maaloy and South Vaagso and steamed up Ulversund. Their main task was to seek out and destroy or capture shipping, but the *Oribi* carried some Commando troops which were to be landed to destroy the telephone exchange, the road, and other communications at Rodberg, near the northern end of Ulversund. These tasks the Commandos successfully accomplished.

The destroyers had many exciting adventures in Ulversund, but they destroyed nine enemy ships with a total tonnage of nearly 15,000 tons.

Meanwhile, the Commando troops had met with stiff opposition in South Vaagso, and had suffered considerable casualties. This was largely due to the fact that the number of German troops in the town had recently been fortuitously increased by a strong detachment which had come in from outlying districts to spend Christmas in the town and had not yet left. By 12.30 p.m., however, the resistance had been virtually broken.

The withdrawal of the whole force was ordered for 3 p.m. To extricate a force which had so many diverse objectives, and which had become in some cases even more widely deployed owing to enemy resistance, was no mean feat, and it was successfully accomplished owing to the good organisation of Rear-Admiral Burrough and Brigadier Haydon and initiative and superb seamanship on the part of many officers and men. The Royal Air Force also played an important part. They had raided the German aerodrome at Herdla and put it out of action for the day, so that the force met with little interference from the Luftwaffe.

The Vaagso Raid was a small affair compared with subsequent operations against enemy occupied territory, but it had important results. It caused the Germans considerable uneasiness and led to the movement of bodies of enemy troops. All the German offices, huts, and houses inhabited by Germans had been destroyed, as had also the wireless station, telephone exchange, a car and lorry park, a barracks, an ammunition dump, a tank, a searchlight, and a number of coast defence guns. At least 150 Germans had been killed and many more wounded. Ninety-eight German prisoners and four quislings were taken and brought back to the United Kingdom, in addition to seventy-seven Norwegians who wished to join the

forces of the United Nations. Almost every economic objective had been destroyed. Among these were the canning factory, and the herring oil factory, and three other factories.

Despite some slight interference from the Luftwaffe, the whole force made the crossing of the North Sea to its United Kingdom base without loss.

For his part in conducting the whole of the naval part of this expedition Rear-Admiral Burrough was awarded the D.S.O.

Rear-Admiral Burrough's next big job was to take a vital convoy through to Malta in August, 1942. There is little doubt that when the whole history of this war comes to be written, the passage of this convoy will mark one of the important turning points of the struggle. Malta had for months been withstanding the greatest weight of attack which the German and Italian air forces could muster. The garrison and inhabitants of that indomitable island were short of food and every other commodity. What was worse, there was so little petrol on the island that the activities of the defending fighter aircraft were being seriously curtailed, while the guns had to be limited to a small and very inadequate allowance of ammunition per day.

This was the state of Malta when Admiral Burrough sailed from England in command of the escort of the convoy. As such, he was in charge of the convoy, with his flag now flying in H.M.S. *Nigeria*.

It was not until the convoy and its escort was well out in the Atlantic that the men knew their destination or the importance of the task before them. This was made known to the ship's company of the *Nigeria* by Burrough in a short speech delivered over the ship's system of loud speakers. In other ships the commanding officers told their crews in similar fashion.

All the way to Gibraltar Rear-Admiral Burrough took his escorts and the convoy through their paces, drilling them mercilessly from midnight to midnight. He had told the masters of the merchant ships that he proposed to do this, and they responded loyally, for they realised as well as he that the safety of the convoy in the narrow waters of the Central Mediterranean depended upon their ability to work together without hesitation. That Burrough's training and tireless energy saved the convoy and got the vital supplies through to Malta in face of the heaviest odds there is no doubt. By the time the convoy reached the western approaches to

the Straits of Gibraltar warships and merchant ships were capable of manœuvring together as if they had been a homogeneous fleet trained together for years.

Once in the Mediterranean, the convoy received cover and support from battleships and aircraft carriers, but the merchant ships remained chiefly the responsibility of Rear-Admiral Burrough, as the flag officer commanding the close escort.

On the first evening in the Mediterranean there was tragedy. The aircraft carrier *Eagle* was torpedoed by a U-boat and sank in a few minutes. It was a bitter blow. Apart from the loss of a gallant old ship, the convoy was robbed of a valuable proportion of its fighter aircraft cover. And later that evening the first of the enemy air attacks developed—German Junkers 88 dive-bombers and Italian torpedo-carrying aircraft. The enemy aircraft suffered losses both from the fighter aircraft from the remaining aircraft carriers and from the anti-aircraft fire of the warships and merchant ships in convoy, but no ship was hit.

Early next morning the "blitz" started again. Again the main attacking forces were German dive-bombers and Italian torpedo-carriers, but now the torpedo-carriers had fighter protection. All that day the convoy plodded on, the ships weaving about among the bomb bursts in the manner in which they had been trained by Admiral Burrough. Yet at the end of the day the only real casualty was the destroyer H.M.S. *Foresight*, which had been hit by an aircraft torpedo. She was taken in tow by another destroyer, but had eventually to be sunk by our own men twelve hours later. So far as the convoy was concerned, one ship—the immortal S.S. *Ohio*, an American-built tanker with a British crew—had suffered some damage from a bomb and had been forced to drop astern. The determination of her master—Captain D. W. Mason, who was afterwards awarded the George Cross—and his crew got the ship going again, and she caught up with the rest of the convoy within a few hours.

That evening the convoy approached the central narrows between Sicily and Cape Bon, on the Tunisian coast, and the covering forces of battleships and aircraft carriers turned back to the westward. It was left to Rear-Admiral Burrough to fight the convoy through the last, and most dangerous, part of its voyage to Malta.

Soon afterwards there was tragedy. This time it was Burrough's

flagship, H.M.S. *Nigeria*, which was hit by torpedo from a U-boat. There was a blinding flash, a terrific explosion, and then utter darkness, for the explosion had shattered all the lights in the ship. The cruiser at once began to list over to an alarming angle. On the upper deck men grouped together at their stations, looking to the bridge for orders. They were orderly and calm—surprisingly calm when one considers the prolonged ordeal of air attacks which they had undergone, and the fact that they had so recently seen the aircraft carrier *Eagle* torpedoed, and sink suddenly with just such a list.

On the bridge, however, Admiral Burrough was, to quote one who was there, “leaning over the side of the bridge looking rather like a yachtsman at the tiller of a boat heeling well over to a fresh breeze.”

Any misgivings which the men on the upper deck may have had were quickly allayed by their Admiral. “Don’t worry,” he shouted to the men on the upper deck. “She’ll hold. . . . Let’s have a cigarette.”

Meanwhile the destroyer *Ashanti* had been ordered alongside. Admiral Burrough’s farewell to the men of his flagship has already been described. One cannot, however, pass over this incident without quoting the words of an officer who was in H.M.S. *Ashanti* at the time: “A dive-bombing attack was developing. The bombs started to drop, and the guns of both ships were firing upwards as the gap between the *Ashanti* and *Nigeria* widened, and the men on the sloping decks of the cruiser cheered their Admiral. It was a sad, but nevertheless a great moment.”

That night in the narrows between Sicily and Tunisia has been described as “ugly and uncomfortable.” There was more than a chance of U-boats. Soon there was the certainty of E-boats. The cruiser *Manchester* was hit and subsequently sank. At least two E-boats were blown out of the water by the British gunfire. The convoy and its escort seemed “easy meat” to the enemy, for it could take little evading action, being confined to the narrow channel between the off-shore navigational dangers and the minefields.

Then, with the dawn which followed a night in which there was no rest for any one, and nothing but anxiety for the Admiral commanding, there came more air attacks. The enemy realised that the convoy was on its last lap, and that their efforts so far—although they had inflicted loss and damage—had not been enough to stop

or annihilate the convoy. They threw in everything they had in a last desperate gamble.

By now, however, the convoy and its escorts had the assistance of the Beaufighters and Spitfires of the Royal Air Force operating from Malta. The pilots of these aircraft did magnificent work, breaking up formation after formation of the enemy, but in so doing they were burning precious petrol, and using precious ammunition. There was very little of either in Malta. That convoy simply *had* to be got through, and particularly the tanker *Ohio*. That gallant ship had again been hit. She had had a fire on board, and a Junkers 88 had come spinning down and crashed into the side of her bridge, demolishing most of its structure, but still the *Ohio* and the rest of the convoy plodded on towards Malta.

The Germans were quick to realise the importance of the tanker, and they had been concentrating their efforts to sink the *Ohio*. To make matters worse the damaged ship could no longer keep up with the rest of the convoy. The speed of a convoy is the speed of the slowest ship in that convoy. Was the *Ohio*, the most important ship of all, to be left behind to fend for herself while the other ships went on, or was the speed of the convoy to be reduced so that the ships could keep together and give each other mutual protection? Such a step would, of course, add to the danger to the other ships.

It was a difficult decision for Rear-Admiral Burrough, and a decision which had to be taken at a time of acute anxiety and in the heat of a fierce action. But Admiral Burrough got the convoy through to Malta, and, thanks to the unflinching determination of Captain Mason of the *Ohio*, that ship was got in too.

At last ships were sighted ahead—the minesweepers from Malta which were to sweep the convoy through the minefields on the last lap of the journey. Rear-Admiral Burrough turned the convoy over to their keeping and set about extricating his escort forces from their very dangerous position.

As the escort turned to the westward signals were exchanged. Two will bear quoting. Burrough sent to the *Ohio*: "Try to get to Malta. They need you badly. I am proud to have known you." One of the merchant ship captains sent to Rear-Admiral Burrough: "Thanks to your care and a smile from the goddess of luck, we have reached Malta." Those two signals well illustrate the relations between the "navy of defence" and the "navy of supply" during

one of the greatest and fiercest convoy actions in history. They are also a commentary on the character and leadership of Admiral Burrough.

For his work in getting that convoy through to Malta Rear-Admiral Burrough was made a Knight of the Order of the British Empire.

Shortly before daylight on November 8th, 1942, Allied troops began to land at a number of places on the coast of French North Africa. What the Prime Minister so aptly described as "This majestic enterprise" had begun.

The scope of the operation was gigantic. Convoys of hundreds of ships had to be taken unobserved and unsuspected to their destinations and delivered at them at the chosen moment. These armadas had to travel the Atlantic, infested by U-boats and covered from time to time by enemy aircraft. Then they had to pass through the bottleneck of the Straits of Gibraltar. For those vast convoys to do so at night in peace time would have been a feat, but in war no lights could be shown, and the utmost silence and secrecy preserved. The danger of collision or of running into a fishing fleet was very great.

But those hundreds of ships passed safely through the Straits—a feat which experienced navigators characterise as a near-miracle—and the convoys reached their destinations without the loss of a single ship.

In command of the "Eastern Task Force"—that nearest to the enemy bases in Sardinia—was Rear-Admiral Sir Harold Burrough. His was a command involving great difficulty and danger. He had to cover the landing of large numbers of troops, their equipment and supplies. He had to help to quell any resistance, remembering all the time that the greater the damage and casualties inflicted upon the French the smaller would become the chances of the much-to-be-desired peaceful settlement of political difficulties. He had to guard the transports and supply ships against the inevitable air attacks emanating from the enemy's Sardinian airfields. Later, he had to deal with the greatest concentrated U-boat effort which has so far been met. The enemy concentrated over fifty U-boats in the waters off Algeria, and there is no doubt that he expected to be able to cripple the whole Allied expedition. The enemy failed, and sustained heavy losses in his failure. The lion's share of the credit for that must go to Admiral Burrough, who was commanding off

Algiers. For his services at Algiers Harold Burrough now wears the ribbon of the United States Distinguished Service Medal.

Early in January, 1943, Rear-Admiral Sir Harold Burrough was promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral. He had risen fast. Shortly before the outbreak of war he had been Captain H. M. Burrough, Royal Navy. Now he is Vice-Admiral Sir Harold Burrough, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., but he is still regarded in the Navy as a "coming man." His is a name to conjure with among what the newspapers call "informed naval circles."

JOHN AUGUSTINE COLLINS

C.B.

Captain, Royal Australian Navy

CAPTAIN JOHN COLLINS was born at Deloraine, Tasmania, on January 7th, 1899, seven months after the death of his father, Dr. M. J. Collins. Fourteen years later he joined the Royal Australian Naval College. In the First World War he served with the Royal Navy, first in the battleship H.M.S. *Canada* with the Grand Fleet, and then in the destroyer flotilla leader, H.M.S. *Spenser*, in the Harwich Force. There, as an acting-sub-lieutenant, he had a hand in bringing in the surrendered German U-boat fleet.

Twenty-seven and a half years after joining the Royal Australian Naval College as a rather frightened new cadet, John Collins was created a Companion of the Order of the Bath for his part in the sinking of the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in the Mediterranean. He was then in command of the Australian cruiser *Sydney*.

The sinking of Italy's fastest cruiser was by no means the only exploit of H.M.A.S. *Sydney* under Collins's command during nearly two years' service with the British Mediterranean Fleet. When the ship got back to Sydney she was accorded a tremendous reception and, on her quarter-deck the Australian Navy Minister summarised her Mediterranean activities as follows:

"Since she left Australia the Sydney has steamed 80,000 miles. She has stood long and arduous spells at sea in all weathers, and under war conditions, which have put a big strain on men and materials. The men and the ship have stood up to the strain magnificently. She has successfully withstood sixty heavy bombing attacks from the air while at sea. She has been in action a score of times against other surface craft and submarines as well as shore batteries. She has fired over 4000 shells in her various engagements. And she has done this without the loss of a single man, and without the loss of an hour's fighting efficiency."

From the Mediterranean, Collins went first to Singapore as Assistant Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, China Station, and then became Commodore commanding the China Force. Two less enviable appointments, at a time when the first flood of Japanese



Captain J. A. Collins

aggression was sweeping southwards and it devolved upon the navy to fight delaying actions against hopeless odds, it would be difficult to imagine. Collins was anxious and worried, but he was never daunted. After the loss of Java he went to Fremantle, Western Australia, to make all possible preparations for the expected Japanese invasion. Now he has taken over command of the cruiser *Shropshire*, presented to the Australian Government by Great Britain to replace the Australian cruiser *Canberra*, lost in action in the Solomon Islands.

In peace, as well as in war, Collins has had a varied career. In 1923 he specialised in gunnery. He is a hard worker as well as a hard fighter, and he passed out top of the long gunnery course at Whale Island, Portsmouth, and won the Egerton Prize. This is a most coveted feat, for it carries with it the virtual certainty of promotion. After a commission as gunnery officer of the Australian cruiser *Melbourne*, serving in the Mediterranean Fleet, Collins was Australian Naval liaison officer during the visit of the present King and Queen, then Duke and Duchess of York, to Australia in 1927. He came back to England in H.M.S. *Renown* and superintended the gunnery installation of the new 8-inch gun cruiser, H.M.A.S. *Australia*, which was then building. With her completion, he became Squadron Gunnery Officer of the Royal Australian Navy.

Then, in 1930, came a turning point. John Collins, still a Lieutenant-Commander with no "brass hat" as yet in sight, was sent for by his captain—Captain Chalmers. Captain Chalmers was an officer of great insight, and when Collins refers to this stage in his career he interjects "whose name be praised" when he mentions Captain Chalmers.

Captain Chalmers told Collins that he was a good gunnery officer, but that he thought Collins was becoming obsessed with his specialist duties and that there was danger of him becoming a bad naval officer, in the general sense, as a result. The Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron (Admiral Evans, afterwards Sir Edward Evans) had, he said, offered Collins the command of a destroyer if he gave up his specialisation in gunnery, and Captain Chalmers gave him twenty-four hours to make up his mind. It was a difficult decision to make. For seven years Collins had lived, thought and dreamt gunnery. He had worked his way to the appointment of Squadron Gunnery Officer of the Royal Australian Navy, and had reasonable expectation of promotion in due course.

On the other hand, he had had nothing to do with destroyers since his days with the Harwich Force as a young acting-sub-lieutenant. He felt that he might almost as well have been asked to take command of an airship, for he had qualified as a free balloon pilot in 1917.

Collins, however, saw the wisdom of his captain's words. He decided to abandon his specialist gunnery duties and become the commanding officer of the destroyer *Anzac* of the Royal Australian Navy. To use his own words: "I took the destroyer and married a wife all in the same week and have never regretted the change—and I think I can say I am a better naval officer for both experiences."

The year 1935 found Collins, now a commander, "standing by" the ship he was later to command in battle, while she was still being completed at Swan-Hunter's yard at Wallsend-on-Tyne. After the victory over the Italian cruisers, in which the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* was sunk, Captain Collins said that the fight was won "half in the design department of the Admiralty and in the Tyneside yard that built the *Sydney*, and the other half by reliable weapons well handled by the ship's company of good Australians."

In 1938 Collins, who had been promoted to Captain on the last day of 1937, was appointed Assistant Chief of the Staff at the Navy Office at Melbourne. The Chief of the Naval Staff at Melbourne was then Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, who had been lent from the Royal Navy. When Germany invaded Poland Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin was in England on duty, and Commodore Boucher, the Second Naval Member of the Australian Navy Board, had only just arrived in Australia to take up his duties. Much, therefore, devolved upon Captain Collins in setting in motion the machinery which put every unit of the Royal Australian Navy on a war footing and authorised them to act against the enemy immediately on receipt of the "war telegram" from Great Britain.

A month after the outbreak of war Captain Collins took over command of H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, at that time serving in Australian waters.

By the middle of May, 1940, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Fascist Italy would enter the war, seeking to profit thereby, at the moment when France was virtually beaten, and to realistic eyes the collapse of the British Empire seemed inevitable.

H.M.A.S. *Sydney* had accordingly sailed for the Mediterranean to join the flag of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham.

H.M.A.S. *Sydney* was in action eleven days after Italy entered the war. The intervening ten days had not been spent in idleness, the *Sydney* had taken part in Admiral Cunningham's initial challenge to the Italian Navy, when he swept the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean immediately after Italy's declaration of war.

Just before dawn on June 21st, 1940, the *Sydney*, *Orion* and the French battleship *Lorraine*, and destroyers, arrived off Bardia, which was being used as a supply base for General Graziani's Libyan armies. The *Sydney's* Seagull Amphibian aircraft was catapulted to spot for the guns, which began bombarding the port and harbour works of Bardia just before 6 a.m. That was the first blow of the Allied Navies at Mussolini's Empire, and it was most effective.

A week later Collins was in action again, this time against surface units of the Italian navy—he had already attacked a U-boat, but had not claimed success since the only evidence which came to the surface after the depth charge explosions had been oil and bubbles.

The *Sydney* was part of a force covering a Malta convoy operation when, on the afternoon of June 27th, 1940, aircraft reported three Italian destroyers to the northward. It was essential that these should be driven off or sunk before nightfall, to avoid any possibility of them attacking the convoy during dark hours.

Contact was made with the enemy in the late afternoon. The three enemy destroyers retired at full speed behind smoke and presented a difficult target to the British cruisers. Eventually, however, one was hit and lost speed. The *Sydney* was detailed to finish her off while the remainder of the squadron continued to chase the two other Italians. It soon became evident, however, that there was no possibility of catching them, and the chase was abandoned. Meanwhile the *Sydney* had reduced the damaged destroyer to a mass of wreckage, had ceased to fire and was closing in to rescue survivors.

As the *Sydney* came into about 4000 yards, the Italians fired two torpedoes and brought one gun back into action. It was distasteful to Collins and his men to hammer virtually helpless men, but there was no alternative. The *Sydney* opened fire again, and in a few minutes the destroyer sank. Collins picked up forty-seven survivors from the destroyer. She had been the *Espero*, with a complement of about 150 officers and men. There were still Italians struggling in the water when the *Sydney* had to abandon rescue work and

"proceed with all despatch in the execution of orders," but Collins dropped a cutter and left it floating, hoping that it would be found by the swimmers and give them a chance of survival.

It was during this operation that the *Sydney* was subjected to twenty-five air attacks in one day. Collins and his men were certainly seeing action. The running of that convoy to Malta necessitated the *Sydney*, among other ships, being at sea for a considerable time. For over a week the *Sydney* was attacked several times every day by aircraft. Finally, just before getting back to Alexandria, she ran out of anti-aircraft ammunition—and then was attacked again by bombers from a high level.

Collins fired the only shells he had left for his anti-aircraft guns—smoke shells used to provide puffs of smoke in the sky as targets for practice firing. He fired them at the Italian bombers. Whether the Italians suspected some secret weapon is not known, but they kept well above the bursts and the *Sydney* got back to Alexandria unscathed.

Within a fortnight Collins again took the *Sydney* into action, this time in an engagement with the greater part of the Italian fleet. It was the first clash of the battle fleets of Britain and Italy, known as the Action off Calabria.

The whole of the British Eastern Mediterranean Fleet was at sea, covering the passage of two convoys from Malta. The ships of one of these was carrying women and children away from an island already under siege.

The *Sydney* was one of the 6-inch gun cruisers under the command of Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey. It was this force which made the first contact with the enemy soon after 3 p.m. on July 9th. The disparity of force was great, and the British cruisers were outranged by the heavier metal of the enemy ships. They engaged at once, however, and sought to draw the enemy towards the main fleet under Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham.

Soon afterwards the British cruisers also came under fire from Italian battleships, but the *Sydney* and her consorts escaped unscathed.

After the brief action between the heavy ships, in which the Italian battlefleet turned away with one ship hit by a 15-inch shell from H.M.S. *Warspite*, the British cruisers again went into action against the greatly superior Italian cruiser force. The Italian cruisers, however, turned away, unwilling to give battle—even

with the odds so heavily in their favour—once they had been deprived of the support of the Italian battleships.

The *Sydney* and her consorts gave chase, but they were unable to come up with the enemy, although the pursuit was only abandoned when the British ships were within range of the enemy's coastal batteries.

So ended the Battle of Calabria, which gave full rein to the newspaper sellers of London, who chalked on their blackboards: "Naval Battle in Mediterranean; Italian stokers win," and "Italians win boat race."

Once again the *Sydney*, under John Collins's command, had acquitted herself well. She had been in the thick of the fighting when the Italian concentration of gunfire against our cruisers had been heaviest. An officer of one of the Australian destroyers gave a graphic description of the earlier part of the action in the following words:

"It seemed impossible that any ship could go through that wall of steel. . . . We saw *Sydney's* bow nose in. She disappeared behind a wall of water thrown up by salvoes of shells. It seemed many minutes before she came into view again . . . her guns pouring concentrated hell at the Italians. . . ."

The *Sydney* returned to Alexandria undamaged and without any casualties, although she and her consorts weathered at least nine air attacks, in which at least a hundred Italian aircraft were employed.

Ten days after the Battle of Calabria John Collins again took the *Sydney* into action against enemy surface ships. This time it was off Crete, and the action is known as the Action off Cape Spada, the bluff headland at the north-western end of the island.

The action arose out of a dual raid by warships of the Mediterranean Fleet against Italy's sea communications with the Italian islands of the Dodecanese, off the south-west corner of Asia Minor, and against Italian shipping plying to and from the Dardanelles.

Four destroyers, the *Hyperion*, *Hero*, *Hasty* and *Ilex*, under the command of Commander H. St. L. Nicholson, swept westward along the north coast of Crete searching, not only for enemy shipping, but also for U-boats, of which there were believed to be several off the north-west of Crete. Farther to the north, Captain Collins in the *Sydney*, with the destroyer *Havock* in company, was sweeping the Aegean in search of Italian shipping.

July 19th dawned calm, with a slight haze. Commander Nicholson's destroyers were then sweeping south-westward through the Anti-Kithera Channel, west of Crete, in extended line abreast.

As the haze began to clear the destroyers sighted two Italian cruisers at 7.20 a.m. These were entering the Anti-Kithera Channel from the south-west of Crete, and were soon identified as ships of the very fast Condottieri class, each of 7000 tons and mounting eight 6-inch guns.

The British destroyers at once concentrated. Commander Nicholson was in a difficult and dangerous position. Not only were his ships greatly outranged and outgunned by the enemy, but the Italian ships were faster. Moreover he had a dual task to perform. He must extricate his destroyers and, if possible, lead the enemy cruisers towards the *Sydney*.

There is little doubt that the British destroyers were saved by two factors. The Italian cruisers experienced a period of indecision, and it was not until 7.35—fifteen minutes after they had been sighted—that they altered course to give chase to Commander Nicholson's destroyers. Those fifteen minutes were invaluable to the destroyers, since it enabled them to open the range so that they had at least a chance of not being sunk. Nor did the Italian cruisers at once increase to their full speed, and in the meantime dense clouds of smoke issued from their funnels. It seemed that they had been cruising peacefully along without all their boilers alight, and had to flash up their other boilers before being able to make their full speed. When they turned to chase the destroyers fifteen minutes after sighting their speed was only about 30 knots.

By skilful manœuvring Nicholson's destroyers led the Italian cruisers on towards the *Sydney*. Although under heavy fire and unable to hit back, none of the destroyers was hit. When the action was at its hottest and 6-inch shells were sending up waterspouts all round the destroyers, the *Hasty*, who was last in the line, made a signal to the *Hero*, her next ahead: "Don't look round now, but I think we are being followed." That was the spirit of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Collins in the *Sydney* had been between forty and fifty miles to the north-north-east of the destroyers when he received Nicholson's report of sighting the enemy. He decided not to reply to Nicholson's signal, as the use of his wireless would have given away his presence

to the enemy. Nevertheless, he acted quickly. The *Sydney*, with the destroyer *Havock* in company, pounded down to the southward at their utmost speed.

Meanwhile the *Sydney's* ship's company had breakfast, and at 8.15 Collins ordered action stations. Five minutes later smoke was sighted to the southward and battle ensigns were hoisted. Three minutes later the *Sydney* opened fire, continuing to steer for the enemy although the odds were two cruisers to one.

The destroyers, having done their duty of leading the enemy into action with the *Sydney*, swung round on to a southerly course, steaming all out in the hope of reaching a favourable position to attack the enemy with torpedoes while the gun duel between the cruisers was in progress.

The *Sydney* had a crow's nest at the masthead, and she flew, as well as the usual white ensign, a blue Australian ensign as a battle flag. This blue ensign flew on a spur about three-quarters of the way up the mast when the ship went into action. During peace-time gunnery exercises His Majesty's ships fly a blue flag "at the dip" when ready to open fire, and hoist it "close up" when they begin firing. The combination of peace-time routine and the *Sydney's* blue ensign, apparently "at the dip," was too much for a wag at No. 2 gun of one of the destroyers. As the destroyers wheeled, the *Sydney* was firing for all she was worth, and the wag shouted to his gun crew: "Blimey, look at the old *Sydney*! What'll she be like when she hoists the blue flag close up!"

The Italian cruisers at once turned away to the southward, and the action became a chase. At intervals, however, the Italians swung so as to bring their forward as well as their after guns to bear, and their shooting was fairly accurate. The *Sydney* was straddled several times, and often hit by splinters. She was, however, hit by only one shell, and this did no more harm than making a 4-ft. hole in her foremost funnel and slightly wounding two men.

The leading enemy cruiser had, however, by this time been hit, and a fire had broken out before her bridge. It did not, however, impair her steaming capabilities.

Very soon afterwards it was seen that the second Italian cruiser had been hit. She sheered suddenly out of line, with a fire burning amidships, and her speed dropped abruptly. Her consort turned momentarily, as if to support her; then she fled and left her to her fate.

Collins continued to close in at full speed, his guns "knocking seven bells" out of the damaged cruiser as he did so.

Seeing that the damaged cruiser was all but finished, badly on fire and with the fine yacht-like bows of her class blown off, Collins ordered two of the destroyers to finish her off, while the *Sydney* dashed on after the remaining Italian cruiser.

As the *Sydney* passed the crippled Italian and the destroyer *Ilex* closed to fire a torpedo, Collins saw that part of the Italian cruiser's crew had mustered aft and were waving sheets and towels in token of surrender. Unfortunately this could not be taken as surrender of the ship. It was but a demonstration by a demoralised part of her company. Her ensign still flew. There was no alternative but to consider her still an enemy fighting unit. The *Ilex's* torpedo hit the cruiser forward and her whole forward structure from the foremost gun turret collapsed. Then the *Hyperion* closed and fired torpedoes. One hit amidship, below the bridge. A gigantic pillar of smoke and steam rose into the still air. As it settled the Italian cruiser rolled slowly over to starboard and sank.

Survivors established the identity of the sunken cruiser as the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*—the fastest cruiser in the world, which had achieved a speed of over 40 knots on trials. Under war conditions, however, she and her consort, the *Giovanni della Bande Nere*, had been worsted by a single 6-inch gun cruiser with a designed speed of thirty-two and a half knots. If ever the British system of doing steaming trials under service conditions, rather than the continental system of trying to break speed records with ships carrying no ammunition and the minimum of equipment and fuel, required vindication, it was found in the Action off Cape Spada.

The *Sydney* and the remaining destroyers chased the *Bande Nere* until 10.40 a.m. By that time, however, it was clear that the Italian had the legs of the Australian cruiser. Moreover, the *Sydney* had expended a large proportion of her ammunition in the long running fight of over two hours. Collins therefore was forced to give up the chase when the enemy disappeared beyond visibility range to the south-westwards.

The task of rescue was made no easier or more pleasant by the interference of the Italian Air Force. Altogether 555 survivors of the sunken Italian cruiser were picked up, among them the captain of the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, who died in hospital at Alexandria despite

the best attention that could be given to his injuries. He was buried with full naval honours.

Again during the return of the British ships to Alexandria, Italian aircraft attacked. In particular H.M.S. *Havock*, who had on board 250 men of the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, was attacked by six Savoia bombers. They failed to hit the ship, but bombs fell close enough to drench with their splashes the unfortunate Italians clustered on her decks, and to do damage to one of the *Havock's* boiler-rooms.

The *Sydney* had drawn well ahead of the *Havock* while chasing the *Bande Nere*, but on receiving the report of air attacks on the destroyer, Collins turned back to support her. As the *Sydney* joined the *Havock* the latter signalled: "Thank you. I hope your anti-aircraft shooting is as good as your 6-inch."

The *Havock* carried her prisoners safely to Alexandria.

Next morning, as they steamed into Alexandria harbour, Collins and his men and Nicholson and his men were greeted by the cheers of the ship's companies of every ship present.

That was not the finale. Captain J. A. Collins was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath by order of His Majesty King George VI. Lord Gowrie, the Governor-General in Australia, telegraphed congratulations to the crack ship of the Royal Australian Navy; so did the Australian Government. The Prime Minister of Great Britain sent a message to the Prime Minister of Australia expressing congratulations to the Dominion on the victory achieved by the *Sydney*.

While signals and cables of congratulation went round the world, Collins and his men settled down to repair the damage to the *Sydney's* funnel, replenish her with fuel and ammunition, and get ready for sea and further action in the shortest possible time.

Collins, however, could not refrain from paying a tribute to his crew: "They carried on so coolly that one would have thought it was a training exercise off the Australian coast. They sang and joked, and generally behaved as if it were a picnic, but their gunnery was magnificent. Their courage was up to my expectations."

The last sentence is one of those classic examples of emphasis by understatement which so often come from naval officers—and all too seldom from others.

During the night of September 3rd, Collins and the *Sydney* were again concerned with carrying the war to the enemy. At dawn on September 4th the Italian bases in the Dodecanese Islands were

to be hammered by the guns of the fleet and the bombs of the Fleet Air Arm.

The island of Scarpanto, with its harbour and airport at Pegadia Bay and its air and naval base at Makriyalo were to be dealt with by the cruisers *Orion* and *Sydney*. The *Sydney*, with the destroyer *Ilex* in company, was to deal with the targets at Makriyalo.

While the *Sydney* was approaching her bombarding position an Italian motor torpedo-boat—one of Italy's much vaunted M.A.S.—was sighted.

Collins was presented with a nice problem. Was it better to keep on in silence so that the opening of the bombardment would have the advantage of surprise, or to open fire in the hope of sinking the motor torpedo-boat first.

It was before dawn and the light was deceptive. Collins decided to steam on until in the prearranged position for turning to the bombardment course.

Only when the 6-inch guns opened the bombardment of Makriyalo did the Italian motor torpedo boat wake up, and then it was too late. As the *Sydney* opened fire with her 6-inch guns on the specified targets on Makriyalo the *Ilex* opened fire on the Italian torpedo boat, and the *Sydney's* 4-inch guns joined in. Other Italian motor torpedo boats were seen putting out from the shore, and these were also engaged. In a very few minutes the *Ilex* had completely destroyed one boat, reduced a second to shattered and sinking wreckage, and damaged a third. The only two other boats seen made off at their best speed.

Meanwhile the *Sydney* was carrying out the bombardment, with her Seagull aircraft spotting the fall of shot.

When the bombardment was completed, the *Sydney* recovered her aircraft and set course for her base. On her return voyage she was subjected to the usual air attack, but once again the *Sydney* was untouched. It was estimated that more than a thousand bombs had been aimed by enemy aircraft at the ships which had so successfully bombarded the targets in the Dodecanese Islands, but not one ship was hit.

It was after this episode that the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, signalled to the *Sydney*: "you certainly are a stormy petrel."

When Italy invaded Greece, Collins and the *Sydney* were employed on the essential but humdrum task of taking stores, men, and arms

to Suda Bay, in Crete, so that some makeshift attempt might be made to put the place on the footing of a defended naval base. Later, supplies were run to the Piræus.

It was on November 11th, 1940, that naval aircraft operating from the fleet attacked the main Italian fleet at Taranto and inflicted upon it so much damage that the whole balance of naval power in the Mediterranean was swung in Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham's favour. The *Sydney* played no direct part in this action. Collins and his men were busy creating a diversion—and one which cost the enemy dear.

As the aircraft carriers, covered by the main fleet, moved in towards Taranto on the night of November 11th, the cruisers *Orion*, *Ajax* and *Sydney* steamed through the Straits of Otranto. Mussolini considered the whole Mediterranean "mare nostrum." The Adriatic he regarded as so inviolable as to deserve neither slogan nor propaganda. Nevertheless, the Straits of Otranto, leading into the Adriatic, were heavily defended by a closely patrolled mine barrage.

The British cruisers made their way through these defences, though every one of them had cables and wire hawsers ready aft as well as forward in case they should be badly damaged and had to be towed out of enemy waters.

The cruisers were well into the Adriatic when, abreast of Valona on the Albanian shore, ships were sighted. The cruisers closed, and soon identified an Italian convoy of four supply ships escorted by two destroyers. The British ships opened fire at close range. After firing a few salvos in reply, the Italian destroyers made off, leaving the convoy to its fate. One of the destroyers was, however, seen to be badly hit. One of the transports may have escaped. The other three were seriously damaged and set on fire, and it is doubtful if any of them reached port, although only one of them was actually seen to sink.

The job had been a mere diversion to cover a far more important operation, but the cruisers had carried the war into waters where the enemy considered himself immune from attack by surface ships.

The work of Collins and his devoted crew in the *Sydney* came to an end, as far as the Mediterranean was concerned, in January, 1941. The *Sydney* and her company had acquitted themselves supremely well in the Mediterranean. They parted with the Mediterranean Fleet at sea with many regrets, their place being taken by H.M.A.S. *Perth*.

Several weeks later Collins conned the *Sydney* to her anchorage off the city which had lent her her name. Great was her welcome. Off Bradley Head a flag was dipped in salute from a flagstaff which had once been the foremast of the previous *Sydney*, which, twenty-six years before, had destroyed the German cruiser *Emden*. In the streets and on the wharves men, women and children were milling in a vast crowd, anxious to see and honour any officer or man of the Australian cruiser which had borne the name of their city so valiantly in many actions.

Those days of welcome were a greater strain on John Collins than the months of Mediterranean war. When he had to lead his crew on a march through Sydney his feet got caught up in the multitude of paper streamers. It was worse than dodging the Italian salvoes off Calabria. The celebrations lasted two days, and during them there came to light one of those queer anachronisms of which British civic law and custom are so prolific.

It was desired to confer upon John Collins the Freedom of the City of Sydney, but it was discovered that the Lord Mayor of Sydney had no power to confer the Freedom of his own city on anybody. Australia is a self-governing Dominion under the Statute of Westminster, but the Lord Mayor of one of Australia's chief cities cannot confer a "Freedom" because he has not obtained the necessary powers from the Lord Mayor of London. Nor can those powers be obtained by cable or air mail. They can only be obtained by a personal visit by the Town Clerk of Sydney to the Lord Mayor of London—a formality which had not been carried out because of the outbreak of war. The usage laid down centuries ago and then intended to apply to the cities of one small country, still applied by time-honoured custom in a different century to the cities on the other side of the world.

After some well-earned leave John Collins joined the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, China Station (Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, K.C.B., D.S.O., R.N.) at Singapore. Collins's job was Assistant Chief of Staff for planning duties, and, as such, he had to co-ordinate the Allied plans with Admiral Hart of the United States Navy, at Manila, and Admiral Helfrich of the Royal Netherlands Navy, at Batavia. It was a difficult task during those heart-breaking days when it seemed that nothing could ever stop Japan's southward drive.

In January, 1942, the staff moved to Batavia, as more con-

veniently situated for organising the convoys carrying reinforcements to Singapore. Admiral Layton went to Colombo, leaving Collins at Batavia as Commodore Commanding the China Force.

The running of the reinforcement convoys to Singapore was the chief task of the China Force at that time, and a most difficult one it was. The enemy was in overwhelming strength both at sea and in the air, and escorts for the convoys were weak and desperately scarce. Frequently Collins had to send important convoys through waters where the main strength of the Japanese navy operated unopposed with no better escort than old "D" class cruisers of the last war, and small Australian minesweepers. As for anti-aircraft protection for the convoys, Collins counted himself lucky if he had available a corvette mounting a few modern anti-aircraft guns. For this duty two corvettes of the Royal Indian Navy proved invaluable, and did sterling work.

One of the most astonishing achievements of the Navy was the running of those convoys without the loss of a single troopship at sea. Actually, only one troopship was lost, and that from the last convoy of all. This was the *Empress of Asia*, and she was sunk by Japanese aircraft in Singapore Roads, and not at sea.

Then Singapore fell. Such limited resources as were available were hastily organised in a desperate attempt to stem the Japanese flood.

Admiral Helfrich took over the supreme naval command in the area, and a "striking force" was organised under the command of the Dutch Admiral Doorman. The "striking force" was made up of all the available British, American and Dutch forces except the old "D" class cruisers and the old "S" class destroyers, and the minesweepers, all of which would have been a liability rather than an asset in battle.

The "D" class cruisers and "S" class destroyers Collins organised into a force which succeeded in "holding the fort" in the western basin of the Java Sea until it became obvious that Java was about to be overwhelmed. Collins then extricated the old cruisers and sent them to Colombo. He himself stayed on at Batavia.

After the tragic end of the Allied "striking force" in the Battle of the Java Sea, Collins's chief task was to extricate the remaining shipping before it should fall into enemy hands or be destroyed.

The collection of shipping in Tanjong Priok roads after the fall

of Singapore had to be seen to be believed. The harbour was full, and there were about sixty ships anchored outside it. The port facilities were meagre ; there was no oil fuel, and fresh water was scarce and hard to come by. Getting the ships away was therefore no easy matter, but fortunately most of them were got away before the Japanese bombing attacks became intense.

"I shall never understand," wrote Collins later, "why the enemy did not blow most of those ships out of the water."

The port of Tanjong Priok was finally cleared of all British shipping just before the Japanese landed on either side of Batavia.

Collins's Broad Pendant as Commodore had been flying in the base and depot ship *Anking*, a converted merchantman. By February 26th it was obvious to Collins that the final debacle in Java was inevitable and approaching rapidly. He accordingly sailed H.M.S. *Anking* with most of the staff, remaining behind himself with only a small nucleus staff. Unfortunately the *Anking* was sunk four or five days later, with the Australian naval sloop *Tarra* and some other vessels, by a force of Japanese cruisers and destroyers operating south of Java.

On the morning of March 1st, by which time Japanese military forces were established on both sides of Batavia, Collins gave the order for all the non-portable equipment and most of the codes and cyphers to be destroyed. He ordered the two or three small auxiliary vessels which remained to sail and make the best of their way to Australia. He and his remaining staff embarked in lorries and drove across Java to Tjilatjap, on the southern shore. This port was being cleared of shipping by an officer of Collins's staff whom he had sent across the island for the purpose. Refugees and survivors from ships sunk in the Battle of the Java Sea were being evacuated as fast as possible.

Eventually the harbour was cleared. Then nine more refugees and survivors arrived. Without hesitation the Dutch authorities put one of the few remaining Dutch vessels at the disposal of the British, and steam was raised in this ship by the late arrival survivors of the Java Sea Battle. They, and the remaining British community, embarked, and the ship sailed, while an Australian minesweeper took off the remainder of the naval staff except Collins and his Chief Staff Officer, Captain L. H. Bell, R.N.

There remained nothing for Collins to do in Java, and he and Captain Bell embarked the next night in another Australian mine-

sweeper—H.M.A.S. *Burnie*—which had been retained for this purpose.

“Our final exodus from Tjilatjap was not made any the happier as aircraft had sighted a strong force of enemy cruisers and destroyers—the ones which had sunk the *Anking*, *Tarra*, and other ships—to the southward,” wrote Collins. “It was a miracle that the majority of the ships which sailed during those last few days got through to Australia.”

On arrival in Australia Collins took over the post of Naval Officer in Charge at Fremantle. At that time it appeared certain that the enemy would continue to drive down the west coast of Australia, and Collins’s life consisted of twenty-four hours a day of trying to prepare without the wherewithal and achieve such improvements in the defences as were possible.

That the Japanese abandoned their thrust towards the west coast of Australia and thrust instead at the richer east coast is history. So is the way in which their thrust was met and defeated by the United States Navy at the Battle of the Coral Sea. It is true that the United States forces could never have struck back at the Japanese in the south-west Pacific had they not had the use of Australia as a base ; and it is equally true that the first use made of the Australian base by the United States forces was to save Australia from invasion.

Early 1943 found Collins in England. He brought to England an Australian crew to man the 8-inch gun cruiser *Shropshire*, presented to Australia by Great Britain to replace the 8-inch gun cruiser *Canberra*, which had been lost in action off the Solomon Islands.

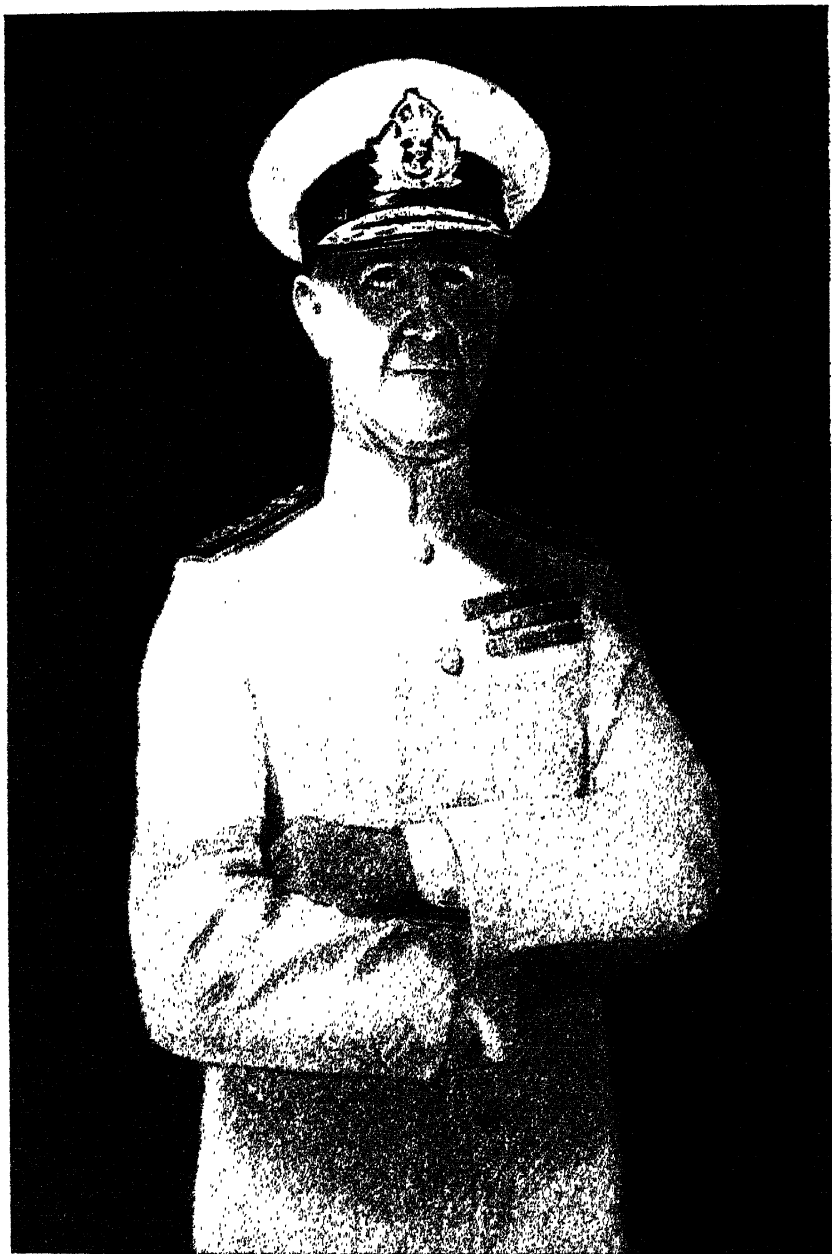
While waiting in England for the *Shropshire* to be made ready for sea, Collins visited a number of shipyards engaged on naval work, and told the workers of the value of their efforts in diverse theatres of war. Among other firms he visited, Messrs. Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Limited, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, who had built the *Sydney*. He was able to tell them about one of his most prized possessions. This is a silver model of the *Sydney* about eighteen inches long. It is not the model so much as its associations which leads Collins to value it so highly. It is rare for a ship’s company to make a presentation to a captain’s wife, paid for by equal subscription throughout the ship’s company, irrespective of rank or rating. It was such a subscription which led to Mrs. Collins being given that model. Collins and his wife had

it with them in Singapore, but they got it away to Australia soon after Japan declared war, and it is safe in the Dominion.

Of medium height and build, fair, almost boyish, and with a great sense of humour, Collins is a man capable of immense concentration upon a single aim. His devotion to gunnery, and his devotion to the *Sydney* gave proof of that. Like all good war leaders, he thinks first of the enemy and how he can hit him, second of his crew and his ship, and lastly of himself. He has the well-deserved reputation of being a bitter fighter—and a cool-headed one. He is also something of a psychologist, when he dropped one of the *Sydney's* cutters in the hope that it might save the lives of some Italian survivors from the destroyer *Espero*, he was doing something which might have been queried by landsmen. One remembers a London newspaper criticising another naval commander in this war for a somewhat similar act because it might, they said, save enemy lives which could again fight against us.

Here are Collins's remarks, in his own words, on his decision to leave a cutter for the *Espero* survivors. They show the deeply ingrained chivalry of the sea in Australian seamen; and what is true of Australian seamen is true of all British seamen. This is what Collins said about it :

"When I left the cutter for the survivors of the *Espero*, whom I could no longer wait to collect, I found it had an excellent effect on the morale of my own ship's company. They were, as usual, keen to stay around and save every one—they seldom think of a torpedo until it arrives. My departure was quite O.K. by them as I had left a cutter for straggler survivors. Had I not thought of this they would have been depressed at the thought of the *Sydney* steaming away while there were still some men remaining in the water."



Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, Bt.

SIR ANDREW BROWNE CUNNINGHAM, BART.

G.C.B., D.S.O.

Admiral of the Fleet

ONE EVENING in the spring of 1942 a man stepped out of the train at Paddington Station. He was in plain clothes and travelling as "Mr. Browne." True, his incognito was jeopardized by the fact that he was greeted by members of the Board of Admiralty in uniform, but even so, few of the other passengers realised that "Mr. Browne" was Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham, the famous "A.B.C." who had trounced the Italians in the Mediterranean and saved the British Empire in one of the darkest hours of its history.

That the commander of a fleet in distant waters saved the British Empire may seem an overstatement to those whose attention has naturally been focused on events nearer the mother country. It is as well, however, to look facts in the face. Up to June, 1940, the western basin of the Mediterranean was held by the French Navy. The French Navy also provided a strong squadron for the reinforcement of Admiral Cunningham's fleet in the eastern basin—and Italy remained neutral.

Then the balance of power in the Mediterranean changed abruptly and greatly to our disadvantage. Mussolini, hankering after cheap spoils, drove Italy into the war. Almost immediately, France fell. The Western Mediterranean was left unguarded, and the fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean lost the help of a valuable squadron. Italy, in an immensely strong strategic position outside the central narrows, had a navy many times more powerful than Cunningham's fleet. Italy also possessed a powerful air force, notably of bombers and torpedo bombers, Britain's air strength in the Mediterranean theatre was barely sufficient to merit the term "token."

In this connection it is interesting to recall that Italy's entry into the war followed closely upon prolonged insistence by the German propaganda machine that the British battleship *Warspite* had been destroyed by German air attack off Norway. It may be that this tipped the Italian scales in favour of war, and persuaded Mussolini that he could defeat Cunningham's fleet from the air

without risking his own navy. If so, it explains Italy's supine naval policy, and points the immense disservice which German propaganda has done to Italy. H.M.S. *Warspite*, as Admiral Cunningham's flagship, was to give the Italians frequent and ample demonstration of Dr. Goebbels's disregard for the truth.

Had Italy thrown all her forces into battle with Admiral Cunningham's fleet in the opening stages of the Mediterranean war it is difficult to see how the enemy could have failed to establish complete domination of the Mediterranean, seize the Suez Canal and so link up with the Italian forces in the Red Sea, and carry the war across the Arab world to India while severing the British Empire's eastern lifeline. A blow like that, following close upon disaster in France, Belgium and Norway, might well have given the Axis victory without the need for the Battle of Britain.

That was the prospect with which Andrew Cunningham was faced. The cards were heavily stacked against him, but he was far from being intimidated. He was quite determined that the enemy should not have things their own way, however much they held the geographical and material advantage.

"He either fears his fate too much
Or his deserts are small
Who dare not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all."

Those lines, written by James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, in the first half of the seventeenth century, sustained another Scot, Andrew Cunningham, three hundred years later. They hung on the bulkhead of Admiral Cunningham's cabin in his flagship, H.M.S. *Warspite*.

Cunningham's interpretation of these lines was the reverse of an exhortation to take the unjustified risks of a desperate gambler. It was by bold but calculated action that he saved the situation in the Mediterranean, and established first a moral ascendancy over the enemy, and then set about destroying the enemy's material superiority.

Italy declared war at midnight on June 10th, 1940. At dawn next morning Cunningham led his fleet to sea, swept the Eastern Mediterranean as far as the Italian coast, sank a prowling Italian submarine, and shelled such Italian naval forces as were in the

harbour of Tobruk. The Italian fleet remained in harbour and the Italian air force remained on the ground. Cunningham had seized the initiative at sea. From that time on he never lost it.

It was nearly a month before there was any contact with the Italian navy, but during that time British ships were constantly at sea, rounding up Italian shipping, sinking Italian submarines, and maintaining the initiative for Britain.

It was during that time that, following the order of the French Government to cease fire on June 25th, Admiral Cunningham had prolonged and painful discussions with Admiral Godfroy, who commanded the French squadron at Alexandria, on the future of the French ships. The solution of demilitarising the ships at Alexandria and repatriating most of their crews was at last amicably agreed. That the problem was thus solved was due to Cunningham's tact and the mutual friendship and esteem which had grown up between the two admirals during their nine months' association.

The first sign of the Italian surface ships being at sea was a report from a flying boat on the afternoon of July 8th. Cunningham's fleet was then at sea, covering the passage of important convoys to and from Malta, and was being subjected to heavy bombing attacks.

From first reports it seemed that the two battle fleets were numerically about equal. Each had three battleships, but one of Cunningham's battleships was the slow *Royal Sovereign*; the Italians had some sixteen cruisers, while Cunningham had five, one of which, the *Gloucester*, had already been hit and damaged by a bomb; Cunningham had the aircraft carrier *Eagle* to off-set the enemy's shore-based air strength.

Andrew Cunningham at once seized the initiative and steered a course which, he hoped, would interpose his ships between the enemy and their base.

By noon next day the two fleets were about ninety miles apart. By that time air reconnaissance had sighted a second Italian squadron consisting of a large number of cruisers and destroyers, which gave the enemy great numerical superiority. Cunningham sought to even things up by using an air striking force from the *Eagle*. The first attempt failed to make contact with the enemy. The second secured a torpedo hit on an Italian cruiser. Admiral Cunningham was thus the first naval commander to operate carrier-borne aircraft as part of a fleet.

Shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon the British cruisers, who were under the command of Vice-Admiral J. C. Tovey, sighted the enemy—six 8-inch gun cruisers and a number of destroyers. The British cruisers mounted no gun heavier than 6-inch. They went in to the attack. The *Warspite* and *Malaya* (the slower *Royal Sovereign* was unable to keep up and never came into action) were coming up fast in support. It was as well that they were, for our heavily outnumbered and outgunned cruisers soon came under fire from two Italian battleships of the Cavour class.

The Italian cruisers turned away after a few long-range salvos from the *Warspite*. A few minutes later the *Warspite* and *Malaya* opened fire on the Italian battleships, and the *Warspite* hit the *Cesare* with a 15-inch shell at a range of 13 miles. That was enough for the Italians. They turned away under cover of a smoke screen. They were followed into the smoke by their cruisers, while the Italian destroyers fired torpedoes—more in order to delay the British pursuit than in the hope of scoring hits—before they, too, took refuge in the smoke.

British cruisers chased the enemy to the edge of the smoke, while Cunningham tried to work round it to catch the enemy as he came out of the smoke screen, but when the smoke cleared there were no Italian warships in sight. He continued to chase, however, until the Calabrian coast was in sight, although the Italian air force had already begun to take a hand. For two and a half hours the fleet was heavily bombed by upwards of a hundred aircraft, but it suffered no damage or casualties.

Thus ended the action off Calabria. Cunningham called it "a disappointing action." So it was, from the point of view that the enemy had declined to accept decisive battle. Two enemy ships had been damaged, but, what was far more important, Admiral Cunningham's fleet had established a moral ascendancy over the enemy at their first meeting, and the enemy had refused to risk further damage to his navy, preferring to rely upon his air force. That was a distinct pointer to the future course of the naval war in the Mediterranean.

Time after time in the ensuing months Cunningham found himself in the vicinity of greatly superior Italian naval forces, but time after time he was unable to bring them to action because of their intense shyness and the over-developed homing instinct to which they harnessed the high speeds of their ships. On one occa-

sion, while covering a Malta convoy, Cunningham with only one other battleship besides his flagship, found himself in the vicinity of an Italian fleet containing five battleships and a vastly superior cruiser force, but the Italians avoided action once again.

Odds such as these Andrew Cunningham had to accept in the pursuit of his twin aims—to retain the initiative and with it freedom of movement for his ships and convoys, and to try to bring the Italian fleet to action and destroy it.

With the commencement of land fighting along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the Commander-in-Chief found that the commitments of his already inadequate force were greatly increased. Enemy ports and strong points on the coast had to be bombarded from the sea; supplies had to be taken up for the use of our forward troops and landed on open beaches; prisoners of war had to be brought back. Whichever way the fortunes of the Libyan campaign swayed, the Navy's tasks in the coastal waters seemed to increase. When the Army advanced there were ports to be cleared of mines and wrecks. When the Army was forced to retreat there were ports to be blocked and made useless to the enemy. Always there was the ferry service to be maintained along the coast, and an enemy to be constantly harried. All these duties had to be performed in close proximity to enemy air bases and in constant danger from mines and U-boats.

For these manifold duties Cunningham created an "Inshore Squadron." Its largest unit was the old monitor *Terror*, which had seen service off the Belgian coast in the last war, and whose two 15-inch guns were so worn that it was popularly believed that the shells turned over in flight. Certainly they made a terrifying noise, but they exploded most satisfactorily when they landed among the enemy positions. In this squadron, too, were the two old river gunboats *Aphis* and *Ladybird*, which had served on the Tigris and the Danube respectively in the last war and patrolled the Yangtze in the years between wars. Their shallow draught gave them great opportunities, and the audacity and impertinence of their work along the coast soon became a byword in the fleet. The Inshore Squadron also contained trawlers from South Africa, and all manner of other small craft, even including schooners captured from the enemy.

On February 9th, 1941, after the Eighth Army had reached El Ageila, and before the subsequent retreat imposed by the necessity

for withdrawing troops from Libya and sending them to Greece, the Commander-in-Chief made the following signal to the ships of the Inshore Squadron:

"The feat of the Army in clearing Egypt and occupying Cyrenaica in a period of eight weeks is an outstanding achievement to which the Inshore Squadron and the shore parties along the coast have contributed in no small measure. I am fully alive to the fact that this result has been made possible by an unbreakable determination to allow no obstacle to stand in the way of meeting all requirements. All officers and men who took part in these operations may well feel proud, as I do, of their contribution to this victory."

Andrew Cunningham is by no means given to distributing facile praise—which makes it all the more valuable to those who earn it.

All the time Admiral Cunningham was sweeping to and fro with his fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean in hopes of being able to bring the Italian navy to action, he was training his fleet; training the ships to work as one without a moment's hesitation; training his captains to work with him so that they could read his unsignalled wishes and almost anticipate his every move; training the lookouts, the signalmen, the seamen, stokers, engine-room ratings and artisans, even the cooks and stewards, to form the most efficient body of men in the world. The enemy might have the advantage in material, but Andrew Cunningham meant to discount this by the high standard of his personnel. Off Alexandria the fleet carried out dozens of exercises of every conceivable type, but chiefly gunnery practices. His experience of the Italians had already shown him that they would give his ships the very minimum of time to fire at them. It followed that no time must be wasted; the Italians must be hit right at the start, and they must continue to be hit. Moreover, every arm must be perfectly co-ordinated for the destruction of the enemy.

In the training of his fleet Admiral Cunningham laid great emphasis on night action practices. Normally, night action is a chancy business for big ships, and few naval commanders would rejoice at the prospect of taking battleships into action at night, particularly with enemy cruisers and destroyers in the vicinity. Cunningham, however, thought differently. He argued that if his only chance of getting to close quarters with the enemy was in night action, then night action it should be. Moreover, he knew something of the training of the Italian navy, and he considered

that there was every prospect of the enemy becoming confused and ineffective in a sudden night encounter at close range, so that great advantage would accrue to the British fleet if it was well trained in this form of battle.

Events were to prove that Admiral Cunningham's reasoning was right, and the night action training he gave his fleet was to give him one of the most remarkable naval victories of modern times.

The British Mediterranean Fleet was imbued with Andrew Cunningham's spirit, his drive, and his vigorous and outspoken impatience and intolerance of anybody and anything that did not measure up to the very highest standards of efficiency. It follows that the morale of the fleet was high. It is doubtful, in fact, whether the morale of any fleet has ever been so high. And this was despite adverse circumstances. Shore leave was comparatively rare, and the attractions of Alexandria soon palled. The men knew they could not look forward to home leave for a very long time to come—possibly not until the end of the war. Mails from home were few and far between, and officers and men could not avoid anxiety about their families in an England which was being bombed night after night by the Luftwaffe. The men knew, moreover, that they were numerically and materially inferior to the enemy at sea, and that they could not expect the fighter protection they needed to offset the large air forces which the enemy could bring against them.

That these factors affected the morale of the fleet not at all was a measure of the personality of the man who led them.

On September 1st, 1940, Admiral Cunningham, who had demonstrated off Calabria how aircraft carriers should be used as an integral part of the fleet, received as reinforcement the new aircraft carrier *Illustrious*. She was commanded by Captain D. W. Boyd and wore the flag of Rear-Admiral Lyster. These two officers were Fleet Air Arm enthusiasts. From afar they had watched the fruitless efforts of Admiral Cunningham to join close action with a greatly superior fleet, and they came to the Mediterranean with a plan and with the material for putting that plan into execution. The essence of the plan was simplicity itself; if the Italian Commander-in-Chief refused to stand and fight so that Admiral Cunningham could sink his ships in the open sea, his ships would have to be sunk in harbour—by the torpedo-bombers of the Fleet Air Arm. They laid the

plan before "A.B.C.," who examined it from all angles and found it good. Here, in fact, was the twentieth century equivalent of Drake's exploit at Cadiz, though it was a blue Italian jowl and not a Spanish beard which was to feel the heat.

There were many preliminaries to be thought of, detailed photographic reconnaissances, and other operations which were in progress or which had to be dovetailed into the plan. The execution of the plan had to be postponed in order to fit in with the latter, but on the night of November 11th it was carried out.

Admiral Cunningham was at sea with his fleet, covering the passage of convoys to Greece, Crete and Malta. At 6 p.m. on November 11th, the *Illustrious*, supported by cruisers and destroyers, was detached by Admiral Cunningham, who signalled to Rear-Admiral Lyster: "Good luck to your lads in their enterprise. Their success may well have a most important bearing on the course of the war in the Mediterranean." At the same time, the Commander-in-Chief detailed cruisers and destroyers to raid into the Straits of Otranto by way of diversion.

The events of that night illuminate one of the brightest pages of naval history. At Taranto the naval aircraft from the *Illustrious* crippled half the Italian battlefleet with eleven torpedoes. The Italian numerical and material superiority in capital ships was gone at one stroke, for many months at least. Two of the Italian battleships were so seriously damaged that they were beached, and a third—one of the powerful new Littorio class ships—was badly damaged. The Italian salvage organisation and dockyards would have plenty of work for a long time to come.

When the *Illustrious* rejoined the fleet next morning she was greeted by a flutter of bunting at the *Warspite's* yard arm. "*Illustrious*—manœuvre well executed." The nameless man who wrote that laconic phrase in the Fleet Code can never have dreamt of the historic occasion on which it would be used.

The crippling of the Italian battlefleet at Taranto was most opportune, for it was accomplished just after the commitments of Admiral Cunningham's fleet had once again been greatly increased—this time by the Italian invasion of Greece and the decision of His Majesty's Government to support that gallant country with troops and supplies from Libya, and to occupy and fortify, as far as possible, the island of Crete.

Although the Italian superiority in heavy ships had disappeared

during the night of November 11th, the Italian navy still had great superiority in cruisers, particularly in those of the heavy type mounting 8-inch guns. That material superiority Cunningham was also to wipe out, but not for another four and a half months. In the meantime the Commander-in-Chief had many other urgent matters with which to deal.

In the first place, Cunningham, now that he was no longer faced with a superior enemy battle fleet, found himself able to dispense with some ships which were urgently required elsewhere. The battleship *Ramillies* and the cruisers *Berwick* and *Newcastle* were told to be ready to leave the Mediterranean. In exchange, the Commander-in-Chief was to receive reinforcements in smaller ships, corvettes which would be admirably suited for convoy escort work and would also be able to reinforce the Inshore Squadron.

The months when Cunningham, with ever-increasing naval commitments, had faced a numerically superior enemy had developed in him and his staff a very close adherence to that great principle of warfare—economy of force. The principle had been developed in the Mediterranean to a greater degree than ever before. Ships never went to sea for a single purpose. Always there were a number of different operations in progress, each one of them closely dovetailed into the others, so that the force employed on one would provide automatic cover and protection to others or create diversions to occupy and confuse the enemy.

In accordance with this principle, which had become almost a habit, the passage of the warships westward and eastward through the Mediterranean was co-ordinated with other movements. Certain preliminaries also took place.

On the night of November 25th, naval aircraft from the *Illustrious* carried out a heavy raid on the Dodecanese to encourage the Italians in those bases, on the flank of our movements, to "keep their heads down" for a few days. The same night naval aircraft from the *Eagle* attacked Tripoli. That night and during the next day there were British ships at sea all over the Mediterranean, forming a vast pattern of the practice and use of sea power. In the Levant there were convoys passing from Cyprus to Haifa and from Port Said to Haifa. Off the Egyptian and Libyan coasts the Inshore Squadron was bombarding enemy positions and succouring our armies. In the Aegean there were convoys from the Piræus to Port Said, and from Port Said to the Piræus and Suda Bay, in Crete.

Nearing Malta was a convoy from Alexandria. East of Malta was an eastbound convoy from Malta to Alexandria. East of Malta, too, were two minesweepers and the monitor *Terror* on passage to Suda Bay. All these movements were covered by Admiral Cunningham with his main fleet, then in the southern part of the Ionian Sea. South and west of Malta was another force, covering the eastbound convoy from Malta after raiding Tripoli; the *Ramillies* steaming westwards in the Sicilian channel; and cruisers off Pantellaria joining the *Ramillies* at high speed because the enemy had been reported at sea between Sicily and Sardinia. In the Sardinian Channel Admiral Somerville's "Force H" covered the passage of eastbound convoys from Gibraltar to Malta and Alexandria and the corvettes which were to reinforce Admiral Cunningham's forces at Alexandria.

Admiral Somerville's force fought an unsatisfactory action with Italian surface ships, including two battleships, which tried to intercept the convoys, but which set course at high speed for its bases as soon as it realised that the convoys were covered by Somerville's force. Finally, submarines were on patrol at the strategic points around the Italian bases.

Here, apart from the various submarine patrols, were nineteen closely inter-related operations taking place at the same time; a perfect example of the complexities of sea-power; of economy of force; and of the close co-operation and careful planning of Admiral Cunningham and Admiral Somerville, who held the western basin of the Mediterranean much as Admiral Cunningham held the eastern basin.

The last time in 1940 that the battleships' 15-inch guns fired was against Bardia, which was holding out and impeding the advance of the Army of the Nile. Cunningham in his flagship led two other battleships into their bombarding positions off the coast, thus using the heavy ships as unexpected reinforcements to the Inshore Squadron. It has often been said that naval bombardment of shore defences is always ineffective. Bardia proved one of the exceptions to this rule. The fleet's bombardment played a major part in breaking the enemy's resistance, with the result that our army not only captured the port, but the enemy suffered some 45,000 casualties to about 400 British casualties.

During this bombardment the ships came under heavy, and, for a time, accurate fire from shore batteries, but no ship was hit.

The turn of the year found "A.B.C." increasingly preoccupied with Greece. The Greek resistance to Italian aggression was proving most effective, and the British Government had decided that the Greeks should be given all possible aid, even at the expense of thinning the British Army in Libya and Cyrenaica to a dangerous degree. Time was a vital factor in rendering this aid to Greece, since it was becoming more and more clear that Germany was preparing to come to the aid of her hard-pressed junior partner in that theatre of war.

The task of taking large numbers of men and great quantities of military equipment to Greece was not easy, for the first few days of 1941 saw the arrival of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean, and the convoys, escorts, and covering forces had to spend a considerable time close to the Axis air bases in the Dodecanese. The cruisers covering these convoy operations were perpetually dive-bombed, and often attacked by submarines. We lost the cruiser *Bonaventure* from the latter cause, while the cruiser *Tor* was torpedoed during a daring attack on Suda Bay by fast Italian motor boats. The army and its equipment, was however, transported to Greece without the loss of a man, a gun, or a vehicle.

Andrew Cunningham had, before this, carried out daring operations to inflict damage on the Italian communications with Albania—the base for the Italian aggression against Greece—and to encourage the gallant Greeks. Before the war anybody would have characterised as madness a raid by heavy ships through the Straits of Otranto into the Adriatic with a hostile Italy in command of both shores and possessing very large cruiser, destroyer and submarine forces. Yet this is just what "A.B.C." did. On a calm and moonlight night he took the *Warspite* and *Malaya* into the Straits of Otranto and carried out an intensive bombardment of Valona, the chief Albanian port, with the two battleships, while his light forces ranged up into the Adriatic.

Then he withdrew, unopposed. Audacity had once again left the Italians impotently guessing.

The arrival of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean had added enormously to Cunningham's problems, particularly since it seemed that every new commitment he was asked to undertake involved operating his ships close to the enemy air bases in daylight as well as by night. Already, on their first appearance in that theatre of war, the German dive-bombers had so damaged the cruiser

Southampton that she had to be sunk, and had also seriously damaged the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*. The fleet was left with no fighter cover to speak of, while the R.A.F. in Egypt and Libya was still not strong enough to provide adequate fighter cover, even for the activities of the Inshore Squadron.

When, on March 4th, 1941, Andrew Cunningham, the man who had demonstrated to the world how air-power should be used as an integral part of the fleet, was told that he had been created a G.C.B., he retorted: "I would rather they had given me three squadrons of Hurricanes." "A.B.C.," however, was very soon to remove at least one of his causes for anxiety—the enemy's predominance in heavy 8-inch gun cruisers.

Towards the end of March constant enemy air reconnaissance at sea, and attempted visits of enemy aircraft to Alexandria, convinced Admiral Cunningham that the enemy contemplated some extensive operation. The question was—what? There were several possibilities before the enemy, and the British Commander-in-Chief had his hands full with succouring the armies in Libya and Greece. He could not, anticipating an enemy move, take his main fleet to the Ionian Sea. That would merely mean that the enemy would delay his project, whatever it was, until the British ships were forced to return to Alexandria to fuel and the Italians would have the Central Mediterranean to themselves. Cunningham could do nothing but be sure that every unit of his fleet was "on the top line," while he weighed every possibility and examined every report that came in. Of one thing he was devoutly thankful. He had been reinforced by the new aircraft carrier *Formidable* to replace the damaged *Illustrious*, so that he still had a modern carrier with his fleet.

At noon on March 27th, "A.B.C." received a report which decided him on his course of action. Air reconnaissance had sighted three Italian cruisers and a destroyer 120 miles south-east of the Straits of Messina, steering south-east. That evening he took his fleet to sea.

With the Commander-in-Chief, whose flag flew in the battleship H.M.S. *Warspite*, were the battleships *Barham* and *Valiant*, the aircraft carrier *Formidable*, and the destroyers *Jervis*, *Janus*, *Nubian*, *Mohawk*, *Stuart*, *Greyhound*, *Griffin*, *Hotspur* and *Havock*. Cunningham told Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, his second in command, to meet him next morning south of Crete with the 6-inch gun cruisers

Orion, *Ajax*, *Perth* and *Gloucester*, and the destroyers *Ilex*, *Hasty*, *Hereward* and *Vendetta*.

Soon after dawn on March 28th a reconnaissance aircraft from the *Formidable* sighted three Italian cruisers and four destroyers south of Crete, steering south-south-east. At 7.45 a.m. Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's force sighted these cruisers. The Italians were 8-inch gun ships, capable of outranging the British 6-inch gun cruisers. The Vice-Admiral turned his force to the south-eastward, with the dual intention of keeping his ships out of range of the heavier Italian metal and leading the enemy on towards the Commander-in-Chief.

For nearly an hour the usual roles of the British and Italian ships were reversed; with the Italians chasing the British. What the Italians did not know, however, was that they were being led straight towards the British battleships. Nor did Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell know that the Italians had a fast 15-inch gun battleship in close support.

During the run to the south-eastward, both sides fired spasmodic salvos, but the two cruiser forces remained out of range of one another, and all the shells fell short. Meanwhile Admiral Cunningham was urging his heavy ships north-westward at their utmost speed.

At 8.55 a.m. the Italian cruisers turned away to the north-west, apparently abandoning the chase. Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, determined not to lose touch with the enemy, turned his cruisers in pursuit. Thus the tactics were completely reversed, with the British cruisers now chasing the Italians to the north-westward.

This chase to the north-westward continued till 10.58 a.m. At that time Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell sighted a Littorio class battleship to the northward of him. This was, in fact, the Italian fleet flagship *Vittorio Veneto*. Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's cruisers came under heavy and accurate fire from the *Vittorio Veneto*'s 15-inch guns, and he was forced to turn away to the south-eastward under cover of smoke. Even after turning he was in a very uncomfortable position. On one quarter was the Italian battleship, and on the other the Italian cruiser force which he had been pursuing. To his immense relief, however, the Italians did not follow up their advantage. The battleship suddenly ceased firing, and the Italian cruisers continued to steam towards Italy at high

speed. Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell was puzzled. He could not understand why the Italian should have broken off the action when they seemed to have him and his force virtually "in the bag."

The truth was that Admiral Cunningham, by his handling of the weapons at his disposal, had come to the timely rescue of his Second in Command. Just before 10 o'clock Admiral Cunningham ordered the *Formidable* to fly off a torpedo-striking force to attack the Italian cruisers being chased by Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell. When the striking force arrived over the scene of the action they saw the *Vittorio Veneto* escorted by four destroyers. They promptly abandoned the lesser target in favour of the greater and attacked the Italian battleship and hit her aft with one torpedo. It had been this attack which caused the *Vittorio Veneto* to abandon her action with the British cruisers and turn for home. The torpedo hit also reduced the speed of the Italian flagship.

Meanwhile, three Swordfish aircraft, the only ones available, had been armed with torpedoes and flown off from Maleme in Crete as an additional air striking force to attack the Italian cruisers. These aircraft attacked out of a noon sun, but no results were observed.

Soon afterwards a Sunderland flying boat on reconnaissance sighted a third Italian force south of the western end of Crete. This force consisted of three 8-inch gun cruisers and two 6-inch gun cruisers. It was about 100 miles north-west of the British fleet and was steering north-west. At 12.30 p.m., much to the relief of Admiral Cunningham, Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell appeared with his whole force intact and joined the Commander-in-Chief.

Admiral Cunningham was still pounding along to the north-westward in pursuit of the Italians, who now appeared to be committed to a hasty withdrawal to their bases. It was true that the Italian flagship's speed had been reduced, but reconnaissance reports soon showed Cunningham that this was not enough, and that he could not hope to overtake the enemy unless his speed could be still further reduced.

Cunningham called upon the Fleet Air Arm. Another striking force flew off from H.M.S. *Formidable*, and this succeeded in hitting the *Vittorio Veneto* again—this time with two, and possibly three torpedoes. These reduced the speed of the Italian battleship to 13 knots.

Even so, Cunningham realised that he could not catch the enemy

before dark, so he sent Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's cruisers on at full speed to make contact with the enemy before nightfall, while H.M.S. *Formidable* flew off another air striking force to attack the enemy at dusk.

At the time this striking force arrived over the enemy it met the only two remaining Swordfish from Maleme (one of which had flown across from Greece earlier in the day with the only available torpedo). By that time Cunningham knew from reconnaissance reports that the *Vittorio Veneto* had been able to increase speed to about 15 knots, and that the Italian ships had formed a compact screen around their damaged flagship. On the battleship's starboard side were three 8-inch gun cruisers; on her port side were three 6-inch gun cruisers, and this compact force was surrounded by eleven destroyers. It was a most difficult and dangerous target to attack, but the naval airmen did not hesitate. They were unaware that they had done the enemy any injury, but in fact, they had hit the 8-inch gun cruiser *Pola* and so seriously damaged her that she was forced to drop out of the line. By so doing the naval airmen were instrumental in bringing about the decisive action which was to come.

When night fell the British cruisers were hard on the heels of the fleeing Italians, but they escaped, apparently by making a sudden and unexpected alteration of course to the south-westward. Some fifty miles to the south-east, Admiral Cunningham was steaming as fast as his ships could go. He had made a momentous decision. He had realised that the enemy were even then only 300 miles from their bases, and that by daybreak they would be close under the cover of their shore-based aircraft. He therefore determined to try to force a night action on the enemy, accepting the undoubted risk of such a proceeding in view of the enemy's strength in cruisers and destroyers.

At 8.40 p.m. Admiral Cunningham sent eight of his destroyers ahead to try to make contact and attack the enemy. It was a pitifully small force for such a task, but four destroyers had to be kept with the battle fleet as a screen.

At 10.25 p.m. three cruisers, two large and one smaller, were sighted from the bridge of the *Warspite*. They were steaming on an opposite course to that of the British battleships and were only about two miles away. They could be clearly seen through night glasses but they seemed quite unconscious of the presence of the

great British battleships, and what they were doing there was at that time a complete mystery to Admiral Cunningham.

Suddenly the *Greyhound's* searchlight illuminated the second of the two large cruisers. She was revealed as the 10,000 ton 8-inch gun cruiser *Fiume*, with her turrets trained fore and aft in supreme unreadiness for battle. Simultaneously the *Warspite* and *Valiant* opened fire with 15-inch broadsides. Both hit. The *Fiume* was battered out of recognition and became a flaming torch on the dark waters, which was only extinguished when she sank half an hour later. Meanwhile the *Barham* had opened fire on the leading enemy cruiser, a 6-inch gun ship. Again the first broadside of 15-inch shells hit, and the Italian sheered away, glowing with internal fires and giving off great clouds of smoke. This ship was not seen again. What her name was, and whether she sank or was eventually got back to harbour is not known.

Meanwhile the *Warspite* and *Valiant* had shifted their fire on to the remaining large cruiser, which was illuminated by searchlights and starshell and identified as the 10,000 ton 8-inch gun *Zara*. The *Barham* joined in, and for a minute or two all three battleships concentrated upon the luckless cruiser. She was hit by at least twenty 15-inch shells and reduced to a burning hulk, which was found later by the destroyer *Jervis* and sunk by torpedo.

At this juncture enemy destroyers appeared and fired torpedoes at the British battleships. Cunningham turned his battleships and the aircraft carrier *Formidable*, which was in company, away to avoid the torpedoes, none of which took effect. The British destroyers were left to make what they could of the confusion of burning ships. That confusion had spread to the Italian main fleet was shown by gun flashes and starshell in a direction where there were no British ships. It is believed that a spirited action took place between the *Vittorio Veneto* and one of the Italian cruisers.

The British destroyers, racing round in the mêlée, sank two 1500-ton Italian destroyers and found the disabled *Pola*. It was only when he heard of this that Admiral Cunningham was able to solve the mystery of why the Italian cruisers had been met steering south-east. They had evidently put about to look for the *Pola*. To outward appearances the *Pola* seemed undamaged, her ensign still flew, but her guns were trained fore and aft, a number of her company had already taken to the water in panic, and her decks were crowded with a disorganised rabble of drunken and utterly

demoralised men screaming surrender. Most of the men were rescued by our destroyers, who then sank the *Pola* by torpedo.

Next morning the British cruisers and destroyers rejoined the Commander-in-Chief. Not one ship was missing; in fact no ship had suffered scratch or casualty. In his despatch to the Admiralty, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham wrote:

"Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the attached report of the Battle of Matapan, 27-30 March, 1941. Five ships of the enemy fleet were sunk, burned or destroyed. Except for the loss of one aircraft in action, our fleet suffered no damage or casualties."

In a long chase and a few minutes of battle at night the Italian predominance in 8-inch gun cruisers had been eliminated, and Italy's most powerful battleship damaged. Taranto and Matapan had between them given Cunningham the mastery of the Mediterranean.

The Italian fleet was careful never again to embark upon a project at sea which could conceivably bring it into action with the British Mediterranean Fleet. Even two years later, when its capital ship strength had been augmented by the repair of damaged ships and the completion of new construction, so that it had great numerical and material superiority once again, it stuck to its harbours, content to leave the initiative, which Cunningham had so decisively won, in British hands.

Looking back upon the history of the Mediterranean in this war, one is struck by the timeliness of Cunningham's victories. Taranto allowed him to support the Greeks by landing troops and by raiding into the Adriatic. Matapan robbed the Italians of the wherewithal or the heart to interfere in three of the most difficult and disheartening operations which have ever fallen to the lot of the Royal Navy—the extrication of our troops from Greece, the prevention of seaborne invasion of Crete, and the evacuation from Crete. Each one of these operations has provided an epic story of seamanship, fortitude and devotion. Cunningham, with grim humour, gave the latter the code word "Operation Demon." It was the very devil. The ships had to operate close to bases supporting very large German dive-bomber formations in every one of these operations. They suffered grievous losses, but they never failed. When Cunningham signalled to his hard-pressed ships that there must be no seaborne invasion of Crete, and added: "We must not let the Army down," the job was as good as done. Cost what it

might, the men of the fleet would let down neither the Army nor their Commander-in-Chief. When he signalled "Stick it," to ships short of fuel and ammunition and manned by men who had fought the guns continuously for days, chins went up and weariness receded into the background.

One may well ask what manner of man is Andrew Browne Cunningham that he could impose his will upon a superior enemy and so consistently achieve the seemingly impossible.

Andrew Cunningham was born in Dublin on January 7th, 1883, of parents who were stern pillars of the Scots Presbyterian Church. His father was an anatomist of the Universities of Edinburgh and Dublin; his mother a Scots minister's daughter. His grandfather was minister of Crieff, in Perthshire, and Historian of the Scottish Church. Andrew had two brothers. One is a general in the British Army, and the other a colonel in the Indian Medical Service.

When Andrew Cunningham was twelve, and was staying in Ireland, his father telegraphed to him: "Would you like to join Royal Navy?" Andrew replied at once: "Yes. Would very much like to be an Admiral." So Andrew Cunningham entered the Royal Navy on January 15th, 1897, at the age of fourteen years and one week. It was a fortunate day for the British Empire. A year later he became a midshipman and was appointed to the cruiser *Doris*, flagship at the Cape of Good Hope. He saw active service almost at the outset of his naval career, for he landed with the Naval Brigade during the South African War.

Cunningham was promoted to Sub-Lieutenant on January 7th, 1902—his nineteenth birthday. In the following year he was appointed to the destroyer *Orwell*. From that time on Cunningham spent most of his service, until he reached high rank, in destroyers.

In 1908 Cunningham got his first command—Torpedo Boat No. 14. His next command was the destroyer *Scorpion*. He had been three years in command of this ship when war broke out in 1914, and he remained in command of her until January, 1918—three years after his promotion to Commander. Seven years in command of one small ship must surely be a record.

During the Gallipoli campaign the *Scorpion* was always in the thick of it, covering and supporting our troops at Cape Helles, shelling enemy positions, and minesweeping in the straits under heavy fire. One night Cunningham spotted two enemy battalions creeping along the cliff. They threatened to turn the flank of our

unsuspecting troops at Anzac. Cunningham opened fire with such effect, despite having both his searchlights shot out by the enemy, that the two enemy battalions retired in disorder, leaving 300 dead and wounded on the cliff-top.

After the evacuation of Gallipoli Cunningham was given command of a small detached force in the Aegean whose object it was to operate against the enemy submarine bases in the numerous islands. On one occasion a boat attack on a small harbour was beaten off by the enemy. Cunningham decided to take the *Scorpion* in to settle matters. In broad daylight, with the bridge defences rigged and the upper deck clear of men, he took the *Scorpion* into the tiny harbour and there followed a spirited small-arms battle before the enemy resistance was quelled. Few officers can have commanded a destroyer in action with enemy troops at a range of fifty yards! The incident was typical of Cunningham's dash and habit of viewing "the obstacles with the eye of a seaman determined on attack."

For his work in the *Scorpion* in the Gallipoli campaign Cunningham was mentioned in despatches and awarded the D.S.O.

From the Aegean Cunningham returned home to command destroyers in the Dover Patrol, and was present at the blocking of Zeebrugge. His work in the Dover Patrol brought him a bar to his D.S.O., and he was also awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre. In 1919 Cunningham went to the Baltic in command of the destroyer *Seafire* during the campaign against the Bolsheviks and von der Goltz, and there he earned a second bar to his D.S.O.

His next job was to take charge of the Sub-Committee of the Inter-Allied Naval Commission of Control responsible for the demolition of the Heligoland fortifications. Then he attended the Senior Officers' Technical Course, after which he went back to destroyers, commanding the 6th Flotilla and the 1st Flotilla and the destroyer base at Port Edgar in the Firth of Forth.

During the 1914-1918 war, and just afterwards, there had been friends of Andrew Cunningham who felt that his single-minded devotion to the Royal Navy was being carried to the point of narrowing his outlook. Certainly he lived for his work, and when he was ashore he patently longed for the moment when he should get back on to the bridge of his ship and take her to sea again. The appointments which he held after the war, however, effectively disposed of any such "narrowing" tendency and gave him many

wider interests. He had had to grapple with the first and most urgent problems of the disarmament of Germany. He had been at the Senior Officers' Technical Course at the time of the Washington Naval Treaty. Then, in 1926, he went as Flag Captain and Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief on the North American and West Indies Station for just over two years. When he returned to England he attended the Senior Officers' Course at the Army School at Sheerness, and then went to the Imperial Defence College for nearly a year.

In December, 1929, Captain Cunningham took command of the new battleship *Rodney*. Curiously enough, this was his first contact with big ships, and after the high-speed manoeuvres of destroyers the slow and stately passage of battleships under peacetime fuel restrictions took some getting used to. Cunningham found it irksome, and spoke disparagingly of what he called "the funereal procession to the anchorage," but, even at the slow speeds permitted in an era when economy ranked first, it proved useful experience. Cunningham commanded the *Rodney* for a year and then went as Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks at Chatham for eighteen months. From that time on his service was done in the waters he had got to know so well in the last war, interspersed with courses at home in order to keep up to date with all the latest developments. He attended the Senior Officer's Tactical Course; then commanded the Mediterranean destroyer flotillas throughout the crisis caused by Italy's invasion of Abyssinia; returned to England and attended the Senior Officers' Technical Course; and then went back to the Mediterranean as Vice-Admiral Commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron and Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet. That appointment he held for just over a year, and then, in November, 1938, he became Deputy Chief of Naval Staff at the Admiralty.

In May, 1939, when the war clouds were gathering fast, Cunningham left the Admiralty, having served there for only seven months instead of the customary two years, and went to the Mediterranean as Commander-in-Chief.

Never has there been a fleet so keen or so infected by its Admiral's impatient thirst for battle as the Mediterranean Fleet under Cunningham. The slight figure with the rosy cheeks and the twinkling very blue eyes had an amazing hold over those who served under him. The secret lay in his tireless energy and his great humanity. At sea he hardly ever left the bridge. In harbour he never went

ashore if he could help it. Always terse and very much to the point, he was often rude and always impatient. The foolish, the inefficient and the indolent could not live with him for a moment. With all this, however, he had a ribald and often Rabelasian humour which endeared him to the sailors. Many are the quite unprintable but exquisitely apt signals made by Andrew Cunningham which have passed into the unwritten history of the Royal Navy. And in these signals Andrew Cunningham had the perfect partner at the opposite end of the Mediterranean in James Somerville.

Cunningham's dry humour is illustrated by his story of how he masked his intention of taking his fleet to sea immediately before the Battle of Matapan. "As a screen," he said, "I played golf on the afternoon before the fleet put to sea, and purposely followed close behind the blunt end of the Axis—the Japanese Consul in Alexandria."

Cunningham enjoys himself most when things are hottest. When shells are bursting all round the bridge he will allow himself the luxury of making one of his classic signals. His success is due to his amazing facility for always knowing what is going on and his complete imperturbability, and the fact that his long experience of small ships enables him, when occasion demands, to use battleships as cruisers and cruisers as destroyers, while he never forgets to make every possible use of the Fleet Air Arm.

Admiral Cunningham was made a C.B. in 1934, a K.C.B. in 1939, and a G.C.B. in March, 1941. In June, 1942, he was made a baronet. In this war he has been mentioned in despatches twice, once for gallant and distinguished service in the Middle East, and once for his part in commanding the Allied naval forces during the landings in French North Africa in November, 1942. He has been decorated with the United States Distinguished Service Medal, and also holds the Order of the Icelandic Falcon.

In the spring of 1942 Admiral Cunningham relinquished his appointment as Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, and in May of that year he went to Washington as Head of the British Admiralty Delegation. In America he was a great success. From time to time he emulated the proverbial bad temper of Admiral King, the Chief of the American Naval Staff, and there grew up an accord between the two men which was reflected in the closely co-ordinated planning of the Allied North and West African Expeditions.

On November 1st, 1942, a week before the landings, Cunningham

was appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Forces, but the appointment was, of course, kept secret until after the landings. When, in February, 1943, there was a regrouping of the naval commands in the Mediterranean area, Cunningham once again assumed the title of Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean.

On January 21st, 1943, he was promoted to the rank of Admiral of the Fleet.

It was very fitting that it should devolve upon Sir Andrew Cunningham to receive the surrender of the Italian fleet in September, 1943. He had for so long held the Eastern Mediterranean against a superior Italian fleet, established a moral ascendancy, and then whittled away the enemy's material superiority.

When the Italian fleet surrendered Sir Andrew Cunningham received the following personal message from the King :—

“On the occasion of the arrival of the Italian ships at Malta, I wish to send you and to all under your command my heart-felt congratulations on this triumphant result of three years of war in the Mediterranean in which the Navy, in conjunction with the other Services, has played so distinguished a part.

“This stirring event has only been made possible by the valour and determination with which all ranks and ratings in the Mediterranean Fleet have consistently carried out the arduous duties imposed on them.

“You may be sure that throughout the Empire we are all proud of this glorious chapter in the history of the British Navy.”

When he is not at sea, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham lives in a house where Henry II. planned the Third Crusade for Richard Cœur de Lion, and in which Henry V. wrote a letter before the Battle of Agincourt. When on leave, Andrew Cunningham is surrounded by history; when on duty he is making it.

SIR HENRY HARWOOD HARWOOD

K.C.B., O.B.E.

Vice-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

HENRY HARWOOD commanded the British cruisers in that brilliant action known as the Battle of the River Plate which: "in the sombre dark winter . . . came like a flash of light and colour on the scene, carrying with it an encouragement to all who are fighting—to ourselves and to our Allies." The words are those used by Winston Churchill when, as First Lord of the Admiralty, he welcomed home the ship's company of H.M.S. *Exeter* on February 15th, 1940.

The Battle of the River Plate was no haphazard action brought about by an unexpected meeting with the enemy. It was the culmination of an ocean-wide search which had been carried on relentlessly for more than three months. It was brought about by careful strategic appreciation by Harwood, and it was made a victory by the tactical planning of Harwood and the captains of his cruisers.

On September 30th, 1939, the British ship *Clement* had been sunk by a German "pocket battleship" off Pernambuco. This was the first intimation that one of these very powerful raiders was at large. A whole series of systematic searches was at once instituted, and in these the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* played a notable part. For some time, however, there was no further sign of the raider. Then, towards the end of October, there were indications that the raider was working on the eastern side of the South Atlantic. Four ships on the Gibraltar-Cape of Good Hope route were overdue.

In the middle of November, however, came the news of the sinking of the British tanker *Africa Shell* at the southern end of the Mozambique Channel in the Indian Ocean.

We now know that the *Africa Shell* fell a victim to this same raider which had been operating in the South Atlantic, but the Admiralty had no means of knowing that at the time. The enemy might well have two raiders out. Searches, therefore, had to be instituted in the Indian Ocean, while those in the South Atlantic could be in no way relaxed. It was as well that they were not, for

the *Africa Shell* had, in fact, been sunk by the South Atlantic raider, which had rounded the Cape to investigate the Indian Ocean trade routes and, being disappointed in that area, had doubled back into the South Atlantic.

Henry Harwood was Commodore of the South American Division, with his broad pendant flying in the 7000-ton cruiser *Ajax*. The South American Division consisted of four cruisers—the 6-inch gun ships *Ajax* and *Achilles* (the latter manned by New Zealanders), and the 8-inch gun ships *Cumberland* and *Exeter*. Early in December, 1939, however, the *Cumberland* had had to be sent south to the Falkland Islands to refit, carrying out this work with the resources of her own crew and workshops and remaining at short notice for sea. Commodore Harwood therefore had three cruisers with which to guard the immensely valuable South American trade routes against a raider far stronger than any of his ships. Moreover, the position of the raider was unknown and it might therefore strike anywhere without warning. The distances to be guarded were immense. The South American coast stretches from about 10 degrees north of the Equator to about 55 degrees south of it—a distance equivalent to that from the Amazon to Iceland.

The *Ajax* and *Achilles* together mounted sixteen 6-inch guns, while the *Exeter* carried six 8-inch guns. The German "pocket battleships" mount six 11-inch guns and eight 5.9-inch guns. Thus the German's *secondary* armament was the equivalent of the total armament of the *Ajax* or *Achilles*. The raider's 11-inch guns could far outrange any gun carried by the British cruisers, and the German ship was armoured so that 6-inch shells could not be expected to be fully effective at long range. The disparity between the forces is well shown by the total weight of metal which could be discharged in a single broadside. The German "pocket battleship" could fire a broadside of shells weighing 4700 pounds, while the total weight of the broadsides of all three British cruisers combined amounted to only 3136 pounds.

Against the great disparity in gun power, armour protection and range Commodore Harwood could set his numerical superiority and an advantage in speed of about six knots. These he had to exploit to the maximum in order to offset the greater strength of the enemy.

His numerical superiority could, however, only be used if his

force was concentrated when it met the enemy. On the other hand, the protection of trade over so vast an area demanded the dispersal of his cruisers. He had therefore to arrange his trade protection patrols in such a way as to give the greatest degree of protection to the trade routes while at the same time giving himself as great a chance as possible of being able to concentrate his cruisers quickly in the event of the raider appearing off the South American coast.

On the afternoon of December 3rd, 1939, Harwood received a distress signal from the British ship *Doric Star*. The message stated that she was being attacked by a German "pocket battleship" in a position about midway between Sierra Leone and the Cape of Good Hope.

It is no exaggeration to say that the wireless operator of the *Doric Star*, W. Comber, was largely responsible for the Battle of the River Plate ten days later and the destruction of the German "pocket battleship" *Admiral Graf Spee*. The raider's tactics were to wreck a victim's wireless office with one of her first shells and so prevent a signal being made which would betray her whereabouts. Until the raider met the *Doric Star* these tactics had been successful, but Comber stuck to his instruments and got the signal through although under heavy shell fire at close range.

On the other side of the South Atlantic Commodore Harwood studied the chart. The raider would know that the *Doric Star's* signal had got through, and Harwood thought it probable that the German would therefore leave the eastern side of the South Atlantic. If, as seemed probable, the raider crossed to the South Atlantic coast, Harwood calculated that she could reach the Rio de Janeiro area by the morning of December 12th, the River Plate area by that evening or the following morning, or the Falkland Islands area by December 14th. The question was, which area was the raider most likely to choose? Harwood thought the Plate area, where there was the greatest and most important concentration of seaborne trade; and in any case that was the most important area for him to protect. He accordingly ordered his cruisers, which were scattered over 2000 miles of sea, to concentrate off the Plate, meeting him there at 7 a.m. on December 12th. He also had to make arrangements that his ships would not be caught short of fuel in the face of the enemy.

The *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter* met off the River Plate at exactly 7 a.m. on December 12th. Harwood then explained to his captains

—Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse of the *Ajax*, Captain W. E. Parry of the *Achilles*, and Captain F. S. Bell of the *Exeter*—his plan of action in the event of meeting the enemy. This he had worked out with a view to making the most of his numerical superiority and advantage of speed, and reducing the effectiveness of the enemy's superior gun power by forcing him to "split" his armament to engage two forces on widely separated bearings.

All that day the British cruisers practised these tactics. Harwood's last instruction to his captains was that they were to act "without further orders so as to maintain decisive gun range."

Wednesday, December 13th, 1939, dawned fine and clear, with a strong breeze from the south-east, a low swell and a slight sea. The *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter* were steaming north-west at fourteen knots.

At 6.14 a.m. smoke was sighted on the horizon. Two minutes later it was identified as a "pocket battleship." Harwood's strategy had been right. Now his tactics were to be put to the test.

The "pocket battleship"—it was the *Admiral Graf Spee*, but that was not known at the time—was steering south-east, that is, towards Commodore Harwood's force. The latter at once began to put into effect the plan which they had practised the previous day. The *Exeter* made a large turn to port and steered so that she was approaching the enemy on his starboard bow. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* forged ahead, working round the enemy's bows so as to engage him on his port bow. Thus the enemy could be engaged on either bow and would have to leave one British force disengaged by her 11-inch guns or "split" her main armament, a proceeding which Harwood considered would be likely to impair the efficiency of the German fire control organisation.

At 6.18 a.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* opened fire, and it was seen that she had "split" her main armament, so that one 11-inch turret of three guns engaged the *Exeter* while the other turret engaged the *Ajax* and *Achilles*. Thus Harwood had seized the initiative from the moment of sighting.

At 6.18, although the range was 9½ miles, the *Exeter* opened fire with her four forward 8-inch guns, and two and a half minutes later, as soon as they would bear on the enemy, her two after guns joined in. The range was, of course, shortening very rapidly, with the ships steaming on opposite courses and working up rapidly to full speed.

The *Exeter's* fire clearly worried the enemy from the start, for very soon the *Admiral Graf Spee* concentrated her whole main armament on that ship. This left the *Ajax* and *Achilles* disengaged, and Harwood seized the opportunity to shorten the range and open a rapid and accurate fire from the two 6-inch gun cruisers.

The *Exeter*, however, had already been straddled by an 11-inch salvo, and at 6.23 a shell burst just short, amidships. Splinters from this shell caused casualties and damaged the ship's communication system. One minute later an 11-inch shell hit the gun turret just before the bridge. This wrecked two guns—a third of the cruiser's armament, killed or wounded every one on the bridge except the captain and two others, and demolished the wheel-house communications so that the ship became momentarily out of control. In a very short time the ship was again under control, with the captain conning the ship from aft with the help of only a boat's compass and passing helm orders by means of a chain of messengers along the exposed deck. During this time, however, the *Exeter* was hit forward by two more 11-inch shells.

The 6-inch gun fire of the *Ajax* and *Achilles* was, however, giving the enemy trouble, and at 6.30 he was forced to "split" his main armament again in an attempt to force the 6-inch gun cruisers to keep a more respectful distance. This, of course, reduced the volume of fire to which the *Exeter* was being subjected. That the *Admiral Graf Spee* did not like being engaged from such widely divergent angles, and being forced to "split" her main armament, was clear, for within five minutes the enemy turned away under cover of smoke. Up to that time the *Admiral Graf Spee* had been steaming to the south-eastward—towards the open Atlantic. At 6.35 the enemy apparently decided that he could not hope to destroy the British cruisers under the conditions imposed upon him by Commodore Harwood, or to break away into mid-Atlantic. From that moment the enemy headed for the sanctuary of neutral territorial waters and the action took on more and more the character of a chase; and from that moment the enemy made no attempt to regain the initiative.

The *Exeter*, however, was still taking severe punishment. She had been hit twice more by 11-inch shells, and one of them had put her forward turret out of action. She thus had only two serviceable guns, and these were aft. Moreover, she had a fire raging in her hull, was down by the bow and had a seven-degree list. Never-

theless, she was kept resolutely in action until 7.30, when her last remaining turret ceased to operate due to flooding and her speed had fallen off so that she could no longer keep up with the action.

At 6.40 a.m. an 11-inch shell burst just short of the *Achilles*, and splinters killed and wounded men in the gun-control position and on the bridge. The control of the *Achilles* gunfire, however, was not even interrupted.

At 7.16 a.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* altered course so that she was steering directly for H.M.S. *Exeter*. Commodore Harwood at once closed in with the *Ajax* and *Achilles*, and once again their fire was so effective that the *Admiral Graf Spee* had to abandon any attempt at finishing off the damaged *Exeter* and was forced to alter course so as to bring all her 11-inch guns to bear on the 6-inch gun cruisers. Commodore Harwood seized this opportunity and ordered H.M.S. *Ajax* to fire torpedoes. This was effective and at once caused the *Admiral Graf Spee* to alter course away.

At 7.25 a.m. the *Ajax* was hit by an 11-inch shell. This put one turret out of action, and, by a stroke of bad luck, a splinter from this shell jammed the next turret, so that it could not train. Thus this one shell robbed the *Ajax* of half her armament and reduced the gun-power of Harwood's force to twelve 6-inch guns. Within three minutes this was still further reduced—to eleven guns—for an accident in one of the *Ajax's* forward turrets prevented one gun from being fired. Nevertheless, the *Admiral Graf Spee* certainly did not relish the fire of the British cruisers. When Harwood turned towards the enemy to avoid torpedoes and close the range still further—it was then less than five miles—the *Admiral Graf Spee* again turned away under cover of smoke.

Eleven minutes after the *Ajax* had been hit, when the British gunfire appeared to be very accurate, the enemy turned in order to bring her whole armament to bear on the British cruisers in an attempt to fight them off. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* stood on, however, and by 7.38 the enemy had resumed his westerly course and the range was down to four miles.

By this time the British cruisers had been in action, firing very rapidly, for more than an hour and a quarter, and it was reported to Commodore Harwood that there would be danger of running short of ammunition if the action were greatly prolonged. Harwood at once changed his tactics. He broke off the day action and pro-

ceeded to shadow the enemy. His plan was to shadow until dark, when he would have a better chance of closing rapidly to a range at which his lighter armament and torpedoes would have a decisive effect. As the *Ajax* turned to open the range for shadowing the enemy, one of the *Admiral Graf Spee's* last salvoes brought down her main topmast.

The official account of the Battle of the River Plate contains the following passage:

"That the two small 6-inch gun cruisers had not suffered more severely in the close action was undoubtedly due to the speed and skill with which the ships were handled. The engine and boiler-room personnel played a most important part in the action, steaming the ships at full power under difficult conditions with the ships under almost continuous use of helm. In the boiler-room, gun blast caused the flames to leap about a foot out of the fronts of the furnaces, yet the stokers, many of them youngsters, never paused in their work or moved back from the boilers."

From 8 a.m. the British cruisers shadowed the *Admiral Graf Spee*, the *Ajax* on her port quarter and the *Achilles* on her starboard quarter. The *Exeter* was by this time on her way to the Falkland Islands to repair damage. During the "shadowing phase" of the action Commodore Harwood ordered the *Cumberland* to join him. This ship, however, had realised from jumbled signals received that an action was in progress and had already left the Falkland Islands. On receipt of the Commodore's orders she increased to full speed. The damage to the *Exeter* and the *Ajax* and the shortage of ammunition made reinforcements imperative. The Admiralty also realised this and ordered a number of ships to proceed to the South American coast "with all despatch."

From time to time during the day the enemy opened fire again on the shadowing cruisers in attempts to drive them off, but they hung on.

By 7.15 that evening it was clear that the *Admiral Graf Spee* intended to enter the estuary of the River Plate. This faced Commodore Harwood with another problem. The estuary of the Plate is 120 miles across from Cabo San Antonio, in the Argentine, to Punta del Este, in Uruguay. In the estuary there are two large sandbanks. There are consequently three deep-water channels leading in, or out, of the estuary. The largest sandbank is English Bank. One deep-water channel lies between English Bank and the

Uruguayan coast. English Bank is twenty miles long from north to south. South of it lies another deep-water channel, rather more than fifteen miles wide, between English Bank and Rouen Bank, which extends southwards for about twelve miles. Between Rouen Bank and the Argentine coast there is deep water more than forty miles wide.

The movements of the *Admiral Graf Spee* showed that the enemy intended to enter the estuary by the northern channel, between English Bank and the Uruguayan coast. What, however, was to prevent the enemy, under cover of darkness, from merely steaming round inshore of English Bank or Rouen Bank, or even emerging by the southern channel between Rouen Bank and the Argentine coast? There were three channels and Harwood had only two ships; one of these had half her armament out of action and both were short of ammunition. To separate his ships seemed to be inviting the enemy to destroy at least one of them and then escape to seaward; yet to keep them concentrated would leave two routes by which the powerful German could escape to seaward without being seen or brought to action.

At 10.48 p.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* was seen to be getting close to the whistle buoy at the entrance to the dredged channel leading into Montevideo harbour, and it became obvious that the enemy intended to seek refuge in that neutral port. The German "pocket battleship," in fact, anchored in Montevideo roads at ten minutes past midnight.

To quote from the official Admiralty account: "throughout the day and the three hours of darkness, the shadowing action of the British cruisers had been entirely successful, and every attempt of the *Admiral Graf Spee* to elude or drive off her pursuers had been defeated."

The fact that the enemy had entered Montevideo roads gave Commodore Harwood only a momentary sense of relief. There was, on the face of it, no reason why the powerful German ship should not put to sea again at any moment. Harwood was still faced with the problem of watching three widely separated channels with only two ships, and he knew that he could not expect reinforcements for some time. There was danger, too, that if the *Admiral Graf Spee* left harbour at night, and began to make for the open sea just before dawn, the British ships would be silhouetted against the dawn light while the enemy would be invisible against the dark

loom of the land and in the off-shore mists of dawn. In such a case the Germans would have everything their own way.

In order to ensure that the *Ajax* and *Achilles* should remain to seaward of the enemy in the event of an attempt to break out, and so be in a position at least to shadow and prevent a total escape, and at the same time avoid the danger of being caught against the dawn light, Harwood ordered his ships to withdraw to seaward during the night and close in to the estuary after dawn.

In communicating his intentions and instructions to his cruisers, Commodore Harwood prefaced his signal with the words, "My object—destruction." That was typical of the man, and it found ready response in the crews of his two cruisers. They had been in action against a superior force for the whole of a long day. They had sustained damage and casualties. Yet their spirit was such that they showed no fatigue and had but one idea—to get to grips again with the enemy they had hounded into the ignominious sanctuary of a neutral harbour.

The night proved uneventful, and after dawn Harwood's two cruisers closed in, to watch as much as possible of the wide Plate estuary. At this stage there was some similarity between Harwood and Duncan who, in 1797, with only two ships blockaded ninety sail in the Texel.

At 10 p.m. that night, Thursday, December 14th—Commodore Harwood was joined by H.M.S. *Cumberland* from the Falkland Islands. This eased the strain considerably, for he now had three ships to watch the three deep-water exits from the Plate estuary. Moreover, he had been reinforced by eight 8-inch guns with full outfits of ammunition.

On the following day Harwood had to arrange for the fuelling of the *Ajax*. He had already arranged for the tanker *Olynthus* to be in the vicinity so that his ships could fuel at sea, but the weather was now bad. Nevertheless, it had to be done and, by good seamanship, the *Ajax* fuelled without damage being caused to either ship, although securing wires and even two hurricane hawsers snapped like harp strings.

About this time Harwood received news that the *Admiral Graf Spee* had received permission to prolong her stay in Montevideo but he reduced no precaution. The message might be a ruse, and, as he said in his despatch: "I could feel no security that she would not break out at any moment."

Before dawn on Saturday, December 16th, the *Ajax* flew off her aircraft to carry out a reconnaissance without flying over neutral territorial waters. At 8.30 a.m. the aircraft returned, having been unable to see anything owing to mist. Uncertainty of whether the enemy was still in harbour, and the possibility that he might take advantage of the mist to try to break out, added to Harwood's anxiety. The British ships went to action stations and stood towards Montevideo, but before long news was received that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was still in harbour. The cruisers withdrew and continued their blockading patrols with unceasing vigilance.

That afternoon Harwood received a signal from the Admiralty informing him that the King had made him a K.C.B. and conferred the C.B. on Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse of the *Ajax*, Captain W. E. Parry of the *Achilles*, and Captain F. S. Bell of the *Exeter*. Harwood wrote in his despatch: "This was a most stimulating tonic to us all, and I took steps to pass it on to H.M. ships under my command, emphasising the share of all concerned in the honours which their senior officers had received."

Harwood's K.C.B. was the first knighthood of the war. At the same time the Admiralty promoted him to the rank of Rear-Admiral, to date December 13th—the day of the Battle of the River Plate.

On the morning of Sunday, December 17th, the *Achilles* fuelled from the tanker *Olynthus*. That afternoon messages were received that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was preparing for sea. The British ships, which had kept so long and tireless a vigil, were already in so high a state of readiness for battle that little remained to be done. Rear-Admiral Harwood said in his despatch: "We all suspected that she would break out at any moment. I would like to place on record that at this stage the most cheerful optimism pervaded all ships in spite of the fact that this would be the fifth night of waiting for the enemy."

At 5.30 p.m. Harwood received news that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was weighing anchor. The British cruisers stood towards Montevideo, their crews at action stations. The *Ajax* flew off her aircraft to watch and report the movements of the enemy. The *Admiral Graf Spee* left harbour at 6.15 p.m. and proceeded slowly down the dredged channel into the Plate estuary, followed by the German merchant ship *Tacoma*. The *Ajax's* aircraft reported that, on leaving the dredged channel, the enemy had turned west instead of east.



Vice-Admiral Sir H. Harwood

This was puzzling. Not long afterwards her aircraft reported the *Admiral Graf Spee* in shallow water six miles south-west of Montevideo, and a few minutes later it signalled "*Admiral Graf Spee* has blown herself up."

It seemed incredible, but there was no doubt about it. The long strain, which had grown progressively ever since the *Doric Star* had made her distress signal fifteen days before, was ended. The *Ajax* recovered her aircraft, and while she was doing so the *Achilles* passed her. The two ship's companies, one from England and the other from New Zealand, cheered one another to the echo. Harwood's cruisers steamed on. Darkness fell and navigation lights were switched on, for all the world as if it were peace-time. They steamed past the whistle buoy at the entrance to the Montevideo swept channel and passed within four miles of what had been their powerful adversary. "It was now dark," wrote Admiral Harwood, "and she was ablaze from end to end, flames reaching almost as high as the top of the control tower; a magnificent and most cheering sight." That was the end of a ship which had been the pride of the new German Navy. She had represented Germany at the Coronation Review at Spithead and had carried Hitler on the only occasion he travelled overseas to a conquest—to Memel.

The concluding paragraphs of Harwood's despatch shed light upon the training of the Royal Navy and upon the training of the cruisers under Harwood's command. "I have the greatest pleasure in informing you," he wrote to their Lordships at the Admiralty, "of the very high standard of efficiency and courage that was displayed by all officers and men throughout the five days of the operation. . . . Within my own knowledge, and from the reports of the Commanding Officers, there are many stories of bravery, devotion to duty, and of the utmost efficiency, which show that H.M. ships have been forcefully trained and made thoroughly ready to deal with the many and various exigencies of battle. . . . I would like also to place on record the honour and pleasure I had in taking one of H.M. ships of the New Zealand Division into action, and fully concur with the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Achilles*' remark that 'New Zealand has every reason to be proud of her seamen during their baptism of fire!'

"Further, it is most satisfactory for me to be able to inform you that the machinery and equipment of H.M. ships proved to be of

the highest efficiency, and well able to stand up to the prolonged strain of battle.

"The main impression left on my mind is of the adequacy of our peace training. Little that had not been practised occurred, particularly among the repair parties."

The full effect of the victory off the River Plate and the subsequent scuttling of the *Admiral Graf Spee* cannot yet be assessed. It is certain, however, that a great many valuable ships and merchant seamen were saved.

It seems fitting that Harwood should have scored this triumph against the German navy off the coast of South America. He had served in these waters for a considerable time, and spoke excellent Spanish. He had gone to the South American coast in September, 1936, as Commodore commanding the South American Division. At that time he flew his broad pendant in H.M.S. *Exeter*. In 1937 Harwood played a conspicuous part in dealing with the disturbances at Trinidad, and his official record of service contains the notation that "Their Lordships note with satisfaction the appreciation expressed by the Governor-General of Trinidad of the part played by this officer in the restoration of an atmosphere of confidence and good-will."

In January, 1939, Harwood and his men brought succour to thousands of South Americans on the occasion of the disastrous earthquake at Concepcion, Chile. Harwood raced to the spot in the *Exeter* and he and his men did noble work. The Chilean Government sent an expression of their thanks for the valuable help rendered by the officers and crew of the *Exeter*, and the President conferred the Chilean Order of Merit on Harwood.

He returned home in H.M.S. *Exeter* in August, 1939, but, due to the emergency, Harwood, after eight days at home, returned to South America in the same ship. In October, 1939, he transferred his Broad Pendant to H.M.S. *Ajax*. This was changed to a Rear-Admiral's flag after the Battle of the River Plate, and Harwood did not leave South American waters until September, 1940, by which time he had served for four consecutive years on that station.

Harwood is a big, burly man with bushy eyebrows. He was born on January 19th, 1888, and entered the Royal Navy as a cadet on January 15th, 1903—four days before his fifteenth birthday. He is a torpedo specialist and served in this capacity during the 1914-18 war in the battleships *Sutlej* and *Royal Sovereign*, the cruiser

Southampton, and was torpedo officer of the 7th Light Cruiser Squadron. In 1914 he earned an expression of the Admiralty's appreciation for his "zeal and ingenuity" in inventing a Deflection Plotting Instrument for torpedo control. In 1919 he was awarded the O.B.E. for valuable services in the First Battle Squadron.

The British Chamber of Commerce of Uruguay presented Harwood with a silver model of H.M.S. *Ajax*, and the British community in the Argentine Republic presented him with a silver casket to commemorate his victory off the River Plate. When he got home he was given the freedom of the City of Exeter to commemorate the fact that he had led the gallant H.M.S. *Exeter* into action. He was also presented by the torpedo officers "past and present" of the Royal Navy with a model of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. This model was made in H.M.S. *Vernon*, the *alma mater* of torpedo specialists.

When Rear-Admiral Sir Henry Harwood came home from South America in the autumn of 1940 he was given some well-earned leave after his long spell abroad. Then, in December, 1940, he became an Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty. In his room at the Admiralty, overlooking the barbed wire entanglements flanking the Mall, he shouldered the responsibilities of a senior member of the Naval Staff whose special duty it was to deal with the war at sea in foreign waters. He was concerned with the interruption of supplies to Rommel's armies in Libya, with the reinforcement and supply of Malta, and with repairing, as rapidly and as effectively as possible, the Far Eastern dykes which had been breached by the flood of Japanese southward and south-westward aggression. After fourteen months at the Admiralty Sir Henry Harwood went to the Mediterranean as Commander-in-Chief, in succession to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, with the acting rank of Admiral.

In June, 1942, when an attempt was made to run convoys to Malta simultaneously from the western and eastern ends of the Mediterranean, the western convoy had the protection of capital ships and aircraft carriers, but that from the east was escorted only by cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, supported by aircraft.

The Italian fleet put to sea in force and steered to intercept the eastern convoy, and it became necessary to turn it to the eastward to avoid overwhelming surface attack. At the same time Admiral Harwood and Air Marshal Tedder, working together in the control

room at Alexandria, set in motion the necessary movements of submarines and aircraft to attack the Italian fleet. Air attacks by torpedo bombers both from Malta and Cyrenaica were co-ordinated and launched against the Italians, and for the first time the American heavy bomber force, with British naval observers on board, attacked and hit the Italian battle fleet. Our submarines attacked and sank an 8-inch cruiser, and subsequently scored a torpedo hit on a battleship of the Littorio class.

These attacks, however, were not sufficient immediately to drive off the Italian fleet, and it became necessary for the convoy to retire so far to the eastward that, when the Italian fleet did return to its bases, the convoy and its escorts were so reduced in fuel and anti-aircraft ammunition that it had to be recalled to Alexandria. These movements and counter-movements of the convoy had to take place in the area known as "bomb alley," and the Germans were able to carry out very heavy air attacks by forces both from Cyrenaica and Crete. That these attacks achieved so little was due to the very high standard of the anti-aircraft fire of the convoy and its escorts, and to the protection afforded by our long-range and short-range fighters.

Meanwhile the convoy from the west got through to Malta despite heavy enemy air attacks which caused some losses.

The retirement of the Eighth Army to El Alamein presented Harwood with his next big problem. His ships had been based on Alexandria, and when the enemy gained airfields which enabled him to carry out fighter escorted dive-bomber attacks on that harbour, Harwood decided to withdraw his ships to Port Said and the Levant ports. That the enemy was well aware of his ability to attack the ships in harbour was demonstrated when he made a determined effort to mine the fleet into Alexandria harbour—an attempt which was frustrated by the good work of the local mine-spotting and minesweeping organisation.

The proximity of the enemy to Alexandria necessitated the adoption of a realistic, as opposed to a sentimental view, and Harwood decided to move many of the naval activities as well as the ships. For example, Alexandria had become the centre of the Mediterranean training establishments, and on their output of skilled and experienced ratings the manning of future ships depended. Harwood moved these training establishments away from Alexandria. At the same time all other available sailors were concen-

trated at Alexandria and formed into battalions to assist in the defence of the port.

Harwood took care that the move of his fleet to the eastward restricted as little as possible its activities in guarding the flank of the Eighth Army, and several sea bombardments of enemy positions were carried out by cruisers and destroyers.

One vital factor throughout the Mediterranean operations was the attack by all available means on the enemy's supply lines to North Africa. During the Alamein period particularly it was vital to delay the enemy's attempts to build up his strength with reinforcements, equipment and supplies arriving through Benghazi and Tobruk. Geographical considerations enabled the enemy to mount a very heavy air offensive against any surface raids, while the same reasons prevented our fighters from operating in defence of the ships. It was essential therefore to use to the full the available strength of our submarines and air forces.

The combined headquarters at Alexandria of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force enabled the closest co-operation to be effected between our air reconnaissance, submarines, torpedo-carrying aircraft, and minelaying both by aircraft and naval forces. Very close contact was maintained between this combined headquarters and the Cairo headquarters of the Royal Air Force, which operated the heavy bombers. Of the latter, the American Liberators played a large and valuable part.

The toll taken by our submarines and air forces was a heavy one. The failure of the Axis to maintain their lines of sea communication in face of these attacks was a vital factor throughout and contributed very largely to Rommel's defeat at El Alamein and his retreat to Tunisia.

During the period when the armies were facing one another at El Alamein the very considerable experiences of the past were drawn upon in the framing of detailed plans for the supply by sea of the Eighth Army when it advanced. The most elaborate arrangements were made, and complete co-ordination with the Army and the Royal Air Force enabled supplies to be landed, when the time came, wherever and whenever they were required, either on open beaches or at the various ports as they were occupied. During the Army's advance the Navy was always up to, and in many cases ahead of the combined programme. When the full and detailed history of this campaign is written it will be seen how well the

plans for the supply by sea of the Army were laid, and how the multitude of difficulties caused by enemy action and demolitions were dealt with by all three Services.

As the El Alamein period drew to a close the needs of Malta for further supplies became more and more urgent, and it was essential that a convoy should be got through to that beleaguered island at the earliest possible moment consistent with the capture by the Army of advanced airfields. As the Eighth Army advanced, a convoy was sent through to Malta, and later several more convoys passed without serious challenge by the enemy. The Italian fleet did not try to interfere. Our increased air forces and possession of airfields along the North African coast enabled a very heavy air threat to play its deterrent part.

So Malta was re-stocked ; the Eighth Army was supplied by sea so that it could advance rapidly from Egypt to Tunisia; the Italian fleet was kept inactive; the Axis air forces were roughly handled by our fighters and the anti-aircraft fire of our ships; and the U-boats suffered heavily at the hands of combined striking forces of aircraft and surface ships.

In February, 1943, it became necessary to regroup the high command under the Supreme Commander in North Africa. The Naval Command in the central basin of the Mediterranean then passed to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Admiral Harwood became Commander-in-Chief, Levant. As such he retained the responsibility of supplying Malta from the east and of supplying the Army as far as Sousse, in Tunisia.

Harwood held this command for only a short time, however, as his health broke down and he was invalided home. It is to be hoped that rest and his great recreation—golf (his handicap is seven and his favourite course is Sandwich) will see him rapidly restored to active service.

SIR MAX KENNEDY HORTON

K.C.B., D.S.O.

Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

ONE DAY in the summer of 1942 the German battleship *Tirpitz*, sister ship of the *Bismarck*, and the biggest ship of the German navy, put to sea from her hiding place in the northern Norwegian fiords. She had been drawn to sea by the prospect of wreaking havoc among the ships of a comparatively lightly escorted convoy taking British and American supplies to the north Russian ports. The *Tirpitz* found no victims, but she came within an ace of herself falling victim to the torpedoes of a British submarine. Only the most exasperating combination of circumstances prevented the submarine from attacking. The planning, the appreciation of the enemy's probable move, and the positioning of the submarine had been perfect.

These had been the work of Admiral Sir Max Horton, then the Admiral of Submarines. As such, he was responsible for all British and Allied submarine operations in "home waters"—a term which had been stretched by the ever-expanding scope of the war at sea to include the whole of the North Atlantic, the North Sea, and the Arctic Ocean and the Barents Sea. He was not in operational command of the submarines in the Mediterranean or the Far East, but he was responsible for all the material equipment and the training and administration of the whole of the British submarine service. Much of the credit for the great successes achieved by British submarines in the Mediterranean and Far Eastern waters must therefore go to him.

For thirty-five years Horton has been a submarine specialist. He had been one of the pioneers of submarine warfare. In the 1914-1918 war he had penetrated the innermost enemy defences and had shown a daring and determination which became almost legendary. As Admiral of Submarines, no man knew better than he the risks he was asking his submarine captains and crews to take. They therefore had an immense respect and affection for him.

There is probably no man alive who knows more about underwater warfare than Max Horton, and now, still under sixty, he brings to every task before him a vast experience and a terrific driving energy which brooks of no objection or refusal. That failure may sometimes be inevitable he realises, but excuses he will have none of. He will take no hasty nor ill-considered step, but delays drive him mad. It is not surprising, human nature being what it is, that some people have called him ruthless. If inability to suffer fools gladly is ruthlessness, Max Horton is certainly ruthless. He has no use for anybody who is not complete master of his job. Emphatically, he is a man who gets things done.

In January, 1943, very soon after "Sir Max," as he is familiarly known among his juniors, took over as Commander-in-Chief of the Western Approaches, the commanding officer of an escort vessel which was refitting reported to him that some vital equipment had not yet been fitted in his ship. The captain of the escort vessel was a very junior officer, but he knew the conditions of warfare in the Western Approaches from two years of sea experience in that command. This the Admiral knew. He nodded when the junior officer was bold enough to say that it was madness to send an escort ship to sea without that particular equipment. Then he asked whether the escort ship commander had any other troubles. The escort ship captain hesitated. The Admiral demanded an immediate answer. There followed dialogue on these lines:

"Well, sir. There's been a bit of bother over the seamen's bathroom—but that's hardly something to worry you about, sir."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, it's not exactly a question of fighting efficiency."

"All right. I'll see that you get that special equipment fitted forthwith."

"Thank you, sir."

Then, as the escort ship captain was leaving, the Admiral added: "And you may like to let it be known that I'm interested in your bathroom too."

Not only was the special equipment installed immediately, but the difficulty with regard to the bathroom unaccountably disappeared.

As a young Lieutenant-Commander before the last war, Horton played a most important part in bringing home to the authorities the capabilities and possibilities of the submarine. In those days the

opinion of high authority was that the submarine could, and would, be useful as a sort of mobile mine for the defence of harbours and their approaches, but senior officers failed to appreciate that the submarine, even at that stage in its development, was capable of operating a long distance from its base and striking at the enemy behind his seaward defences. It devolved upon two young submarine commanding officers to demonstrate that the submarine was a long-distance offensive weapon.

During the naval manoeuvres of 1910 Little (now Admiral Sir Charles Little) showed that a submarine could operate successfully 500 miles from its base. Horton's part was equally important but more spectacular.

In 1912 Horton was in command of the Submarine D6. This was a submarine of a new type, having a submerged displacement of about 600 tons. One day Horton dived D6 well to the eastward of the Firth of Forth, and entered the firth submerged. It was a tricky business, because of the strong tides running in the firth; and Horton's job was made infinitely more difficult because one of his main motors burnt out before he had passed May Island. Horton, however, refused to be diverted from his purpose. The submarine of those days was heir to all manner of exasperating failures in material, and Horton held that these should be overcome rather than accepted as limiting submarine activities.

Off Rosyth, above the Forth Bridge and about forty miles above May Island, was moored the depot ship of the submarine flotilla to which D6 belonged. She was his goal.

The first any one knew of the presence of a submarine in the Firth of Forth was when two practice torpedoes from D6 thudded home on the side of the depot ship.

That exploit convinced the doubters of the offensive possibilities of submarines. Three other submarines which had been ordered to try to carry out the same job as D6 on the same day all failed for one reason or another to make the submerged passage of the Firth. Horton alone came through and carried out a brilliantly successful attack.

The cypher E9 will always be associated with the name of Horton is submarine history. E9 was the number of the submarine which, under Horton's command, inflicted such great losses upon the enemy during the war of 1914-1918.

E9, with Max Horton in command, was one of the first British

submarines to operate right inside the Heligoland Bight at the very beginning of the last war.

The Heligoland Bight was not an easy place for a submarine to patrol. It was heavily mined and very closely patrolled. Moreover, in September it was often shrouded in fog.

One day Eg ran into a bank of fog early in the morning. To stay on the surface was to risk being suddenly surprised by German patrol craft. Horton therefore dived. The visibility was so low, however, that he could see nothing through the periscope. At periscope depth there was a danger of being rammed by patrol craft, and no good purpose would be served by remaining at that depth when unable to see through the periscope.

Max Horton therefore took Eg down to 60 feet. At that depth he would probably not be detected by the German patrols and sweeping craft (this, it must be remembered, was in 1914). There was another point. Horton knew that he was in the vicinity of Heligoland, but he had little idea of Eg's actual position. By diving at 60 feet he would get early information that he was running into shoal water, by the simple expedient of running aground—a proceeding which involved no danger when diving at that depth at dead slow speed.

This was the situation in Eg on a mid-September day in 1914. The weather had been bad for several days, which had made living conditions in the submarine as bad as they well could be. The crew were breathing bad air, heavily laden with the stench of oil. Their diet had been for some time one in which there was never anything fresh except the labels on the tins. In these conditions, Max Horton's first lieutenant was visited with violent internal upheavals of a type hardly calculated to improve the atmosphere in the confined and crowded space of Eg's hull.

The sanitary arrangements fitted in the E class submarines were of a type which could not be operated with the submarine at a depth greater than 30 feet. Circumstances made it imperative that Eg should be brought up to a depth at which these arrangements could be made to function. Horton gave the order to bring Eg up to a depth of 30 feet. At that depth it was possible to see through the periscope.

As the top glass of the periscope broke the surface of the sea, Horton, standing in the control room with his eye glued to the eyepiece, saw that he was in a rift in the fog banks. Moreover, he

saw a German cruiser. There was no time to be lost. A quick snap attack was all that was possible. Horton attacked, and fired his torpedoes. As a result, the German cruiser *Hela* was sent to the bottom. It was the first important success of our submarines against the German navy.

On his next patrol Max Horton took E9 into the mouth of the Ems River, and there he torpedoed and sank the German destroyer S126—one of those German destroyers which were making the lives of our submarine crews in the Heligoland Bight so unpleasant and so dangerous.

Max Horton was one of the first British submarine captains to penetrate into the Baltic in October, 1914. Getting through the shallow, heavily-mined and closely-patrolled Sound into the Baltic was the most difficult and dangerous operation which had up to then been attempted by any submarine. Nasmith of E11, who was afterwards to become famous for his passages of the Dardanelles, failed to get through and had to put back. Layton's boat, E13, ran aground and was destroyed by German gunfire. (Nasmith is now Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, V.C., Flag Officer in charge of the Port of London, and Layton is now Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Ceylon.)

Horton's first success in the Baltic was the sinking of another German destroyer. On this occasion the explosion of E9's torpedo was so violent that it shook the submarine badly and threw several men off their feet. Within three minutes there was no sign of the German destroyer.

In May, 1915, E9 again fell in with the enemy, and Horton carried out an attack which illustrates his determination to get at the enemy, even when his luck seemed right out, and his ability to turn apparent failure into success.

Horton sighted a convoy of three large transports escorted by three cruisers and strongly screened by destroyers. He dived under the destroyer screen on the port bow of the cruisers and fired both his bow torpedoes at one of the cruisers. Both torpedoes ran deep and missed. By this time E9 was right in the middle of the enemy ships. Swinging with the helm hard over, Horton brought his port beam tube to bear on the leading transport and fired. The range was only 200 yards, too close for the torpedo to pick up its set depth, and so this torpedo also passed under its target.

Eg was in an awkward and dangerous position. There were enemy ships all round her. Her presence had been given away by the torpedo tracks. Her periscope was under heavy fire from the German warships; and there was a great risk that she might be rammed at any moment.

To make matters worse, Horton saw that the German destroyers were towing explosive sweeps—wire sweeps in which were hung explosive charges to destroy anything with which the sweep might come in contact. Horton, watching through his periscope the enemy attempts to destroy him, saw a line of three of these explosive charges “go up” about forty yards away from Eg.

In these circumstances a lesser man would have broken off the attack and retired to the safety of the depths. Not so Horton. Still swinging under full helm, Horton fired his stern torpedo at the second transport. At last a hit! A column of water and smoke shot up just before the funnel.

But the transport did not sink at once, and, although the neighbourhood was becoming more unhealthy every second, Horton was in no mind to leave her to be towed to safety. From the moment he had fired his bow torpedoes his crew had been straining to reload them. One tube was reloaded and ready. Horton turned Eg to the attack and, in spite of the storm of shells falling round the periscope making it very difficult for Horton to see, he fired his bow tube at the crippled transport. The torpedo hit, and she sank.

Horton took Eg deep and set about evading the hunt, which by this time was up with a vengeance. Destroyers seemed to be dashing about in all directions above the submarine. It was a most difficult and dangerous situation, but Max Horton got Eg safely away.

A few days later Horton found two German destroyers coaling alongside a collier, while two other destroyers were waiting to go alongside to coal, and a light cruiser stood by, covering the operation. Horton was greedy. He tried to attack the cruiser and the collier simultaneously. He missed the cruiser, but hit the collier and one of the destroyers, sinking the collier and severely damaging the destroyer. This was the third German destroyer which Horton had disposed of. Since the remaining German ships made themselves scarce for fear of further torpedo attacks, Horton brought Eg to the surface and picked up some prisoners.

On July 2nd, 1915, Horton scored another success against the German navy. German cruisers were sighted in low visibility and Horton carried out a snap attack, but he could not wait to watch the effect of his torpedoes, as he was forced to crash dive to avoid being rammed by a destroyer. It was subsequently established that he had hit the German cruiser *Prince Adalbert* with one torpedo, but the Germans succeeded in getting her back to harbour in a badly damaged condition.

In October, 1915, our submarines in the Baltic were operating against the German iron ore traffic coming down from the Swedish port of Lulea, at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia. In nine days E9 and E19 (commanded by Commander Cromie, who was murdered on the steps of the British Embassy at Petrograd during the Bolshevik revolution) sank ten valuable German ships with heavy cargoes of the high-grade Swedish iron-ore. Horton accounted for four of these ships, the *Soderham*, the *Pernambuco*, the *Johannes Russ*, and the *Delalfoen*.

The sinking of the *Delalfoen* provides another instance of Horton's refusal to be diverted from his intention.

It was on the morning of October 19th, 1915, that E9 stopped the *Delalfoen* and ordered her crew to abandon her. There was a destroyer in the vicinity, which seemed to be acting as escort to the German ship. This destroyer rushed at E9 at high speed, and it certainly looked as if she was trying to ram the submarine. Horton crash dived. A few minutes later he was able to identify the destroyer through the periscope as the Swedish destroyer *Wale*. While Horton watched through the periscope, the *Wale* picked up the crew of the *Delalfoen*, who had taken to the boats. E9 then came to the surface, and the following signalled conversation took place between Horton and the captain of the Swedish destroyer:

Wale: "You are in Swedish neutral waters."

Horton: "I make myself six miles from land."

Wale: "I make you five."

Horton: "Neutral limit is three miles. Please stand clear while I sink this ship."

Horton's report of the incident concluded tersely: "11.24 a.m. Fired stern torpedo at *Delalfoen*. *Wale* was 1000 yards on her beam. Torpedo ran well and vessel sank in two minutes."

Eventually, with the collapse of Russia, the British submarines in the Baltic had to be scuttled or blown up in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy. By that time, however, Horton had come back to England and had taken command of a new submarine—J6. This he commanded for nearly two years. Then he was offered command of one of the new fast steam-driven submarines of the K class which were being built. He did not take command of a real K class, although his next command was called K18 until she was commissioned in order to conceal the fact that large submarines other than the K class were being built.

This submarine commissioned under the title of M1. She was the first of three submarines mounting a 12-inch gun—a weapon far heavier than any which had previously been carried by a submarine. With M1 Max Horton carried out a large number of most interesting and valuable experiments and trials.

By 1920 Max Horton was a post captain. As such he served first as Chief of Staff to Rear-Admiral Dent, who was then commanding the Submarine Service. Then Horton took over command of the First Submarine Flotilla, which was then part of the Atlantic Fleet. From there he went to Fort Blockhouse at Gosport, the cradle and *alma mater* of the Submarine Service, in command of the Fifth Submarine Flotilla. This flotilla was to some extent operational, but every new development, every experiment in under-water craft, and all the training of submarine officers and men was centred there.

There followed some years of service outside the submarine branch. During this time Max Horton commanded the battleship *Resolution* and then, on being promoted to Rear-Admiral, hoisted his flag, first in H.M.S. *Barham* commanding a battle squadron, and then in H.M.S. *London* as the Rear-Admiral Commanding the First Cruiser Squadron.

This command was in many ways unique. The international crisis arising out of Italy's invasion of Abyssinia led to hasty steps to reinforce our naval position in the Mediterranean, and the First Cruiser Squadron was at one time far larger than any cruiser squadron has ever been. It consisted at that time of no less than nine ships—six of the big 8-inch gun cruisers and two of the smaller 6-inch gun cruisers.

The Abyssinian crisis gave way to the Spanish Civil War. Here

the cruisers of the Mediterranean Fleet played a difficult part with great distinction. They saved thousands of lives and, by their presence and the never-failing tact of their officers and men, did a great deal towards preventing a spread of the conflict.

In eighteen months in command of the First Cruiser Squadron, Max Horton visited only three ports in the Mediterranean—Alexandria, Malta, and Barcelona. It was, virtually, war routine in peace time.

In July, 1937, Max Horton hoisted his Vice-Admiral's flag in command of the Reserve Fleet. History may well contend that Max Horton's time in command of the Reserve Fleet was very nearly as important to the nation as his long connection with submarines.

In 1937 the Reserve Fleet was just beginning to achieve a little recognition. Two and a half decades of retrenchment and disarmament—of treaty obligations and official parsimony—had made the Reserve Fleet nothing but an ante-chamber of the scrap heap, not only for ships, but for officers and men. Then came the naval scare arising out of Italy's Abyssinian war. The Government began to produce White Papers on rearmament. Very little was actually done beyond the compilation of these White Papers, but the scrap heap receded into the background. There remained, however, its ante-chamber. There were no men to keep the ships even reasonably efficient. A year before Max Horton took over, a Vice-Admiral and his staff had travelled many miles to inspect a group of reserve cruisers, and the Admiral's staff had outnumbered the combined complements of three cruisers in able seamen. The officers of the Reserve Fleet were nearly all men who had been "passed over" for promotion. They had nothing to hope for and consequently no ambition. There were grandiose plans for rearming some of the ships, notably the cruisers of the Frobisher class, but the equipment was not available, and year after year the rearmament remained a matter of blue-prints rather than of guns.

Under conditions of that sort it is impossible to expect a high morale. Driving force is out of place in a backwater.

This was the situation with which Max Horton was faced. He provided the driving force. He made things happen in the Admiralty, in the dockyards, and in his ships. The Reserve Fleet not only stirred in its sleep; it woke up—with something of a start. The result was seen in the summer of 1939, just before the war, when the Reserve Fleet was assembled in Portland harbour for review by the King.

By that time the ships were smart and efficient. The officers and men realised that they belonged to a fleet, and were not just waiting for the Admiralty to serve them out with bowler hats—the badge, in naval eyes, of retirement—and typewritten expressions of regret that their services were no longer required.

The Reserve Fleet at Portland excited admiration. This was not only among the Royal entourage, the Board of Admiralty and the British public, but also in foreign eyes. The probability of war was then looming large. Among the official guests at the review was Admiral Darlan, then Commander-in-Chief of the French Navy. While passing down the lines of ships in the Royal Barge, Admiral Darlan turned to King George VI. and said: "You should have asked Admiral Cavagnari (the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Navy) instead of me; then Italy would never dare to go to war."

With the coming of war the ships of the Reserve Fleet dispersed to their various war stations. The Admiral who had achieved their resurrection snatched a few days' leave, and then took over the task of commanding the Northern Patrol.

This was another difficult job. The Northern Patrol consisted of all sorts of craft, ranging from trawlers to liners hastily converted into armed merchant cruisers. Their job was to close the northern entrances to the North Sea, and keep them closed in the worst weather conditions in the world, with, in winter, a few hours of snowswept twilight to take the place of daylight. The officers were for the most part men who had been retired before the war. The men were partly naval pensioners and naval reservists, but chiefly men who had served in the ships under peace conditions and who were hastily made naval ratings for the duration of the war. The ships were almost constantly at sea, widely separated from one another, and their brief sojourns in port were concerned with making good defects, fuelling and storing, and training. They had practically no recreation or relaxation, and each ship's company had perforce to accept the fact that its life was spent as an isolated group of men living under conditions of great danger and extreme discomfort.

Max Horton, by his personality and tireless energy, gave the Northern Patrol an esprit de corps which it would have been hard to equal. Under Max Horton the Northern Patrol "found itself."



Admiral Sir Max K. Horton

January 9th, 1940, found Max Horton taking over the office of Admiral of Submarines. To begin with his headquarters were on the Firth of Forth. Very soon, however, it became obvious that the submarines, although technically a part of the Home Fleet, could not be operated efficiently without the closest possible touch with the Admiralty, particularly the Naval Intelligence Division of the Admiralty Staff, who might get secret reports indicating the probable movements of German ships.

The office of the Admiral of Submarines was therefore moved to London. There "Sir Max" used to work himself and his staff all round the clock, and yet always found time to have a quiet chat with a submarine commanding officer who had returned from patrol or from service in the Mediterranean or elsewhere. There Max Horton used to hatch plots for the discomfiture of the enemy, mobilising all his great experience and knowledge of human nature to that end.

Max Horton is a bachelor, and has a very keen sense of humour which can on occasion develop into a positively devastating wit.

It was fairly seldom, when in London, that Horton could get a game of golf—he is a "bad g" but very keen player who will play thirty-six holes in the time it will take most golfers to play eighteen, for he always wants the maximum of golf and the maximum of exercise in the minimum of time. When he did get an afternoon off for golf he used to return to his headquarters with his head full of facts and plans and ideas, and his staff had a gruelling time.

Apart from his K.C.B. and D.S.O. with two bars, Max Horton holds a number of foreign decorations. In December, 1914, he was decorated by Admiral Essen, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Baltic Fleet, and he holds the Russian Orders of Vladimir 4th Class with Swords, the Order of St. Anne 2nd Class, and the Order of St. George 4th Class. He is also a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, is a Commander of the Greek Order of the Redeemer, and holds a medal and two diplomas of the Greek Red Cross Society for the work done by his ship *Resolution* in the earthquake. In this war he has been mentioned in despatches and has been awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Orange Nassau by the Queen of the Netherlands. He also holds the silver medal of the Board of Trade. This he was awarded in 1911 for his share in the rescue work of the liner *Delhi*, which ran aground near Tangier, with the late Duke of Fife and his family on board.

When, in November, 1942, the time came for him to leave the submarine command and take over the task of Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, his departure was regretted by all submarine officers and men.

On leaving the Submarine Command, Admiral Sir Max Horton received the following personal signal from the Admiralty :

"Their Lordships desire to express to you on relinquishing your Command their high appreciation of the exceptional manner in which you have carried out the duties of Flag Officer of Submarines for nearly three years of war.

"The outstanding successes achieved by British Submarines in both Home and Mediterranean waters bear striking witness to the morale of the Submarine Service and to the efficiency of the training and skilful planning of operations carried out under your supervision.

"The prestige of the Submarine Service has never stood higher than it does at this moment, and for this their Lordships feel you are entitled to feel very just satisfaction."

There is no doubt that Max Horton took to the direction of the Battle of the Atlantic a ruthless and inexorable determination which had far-reaching effects upon that vital struggle.

The man with the greatest submarine experience proved to be the man best fitted to hunt down and destroy the U-boats in the Atlantic and ensure the safe passage of our great convoys. With due deference to "Sir Max," one is tempted to think that the appointment was made in response to the old advice to "set a thief to catch a thief."

The Battle of the Atlantic is one which demands material and always more material—new and better gear for the never-ending battle against the U-boats. The provision of all this material is always a bone of contention. The men who want it are prone to forget that there are all manner of other people who are also demanding that their manifold needs in equipment should be met without an instant's delay. There is only one way in which these various demands can be met; that is by grading them according to importance and dealing with them in order of what is called "priorities."

The other day an officer from the Western Approaches said of

Admiral Six Max Horton, "He is his own priority." That sums him up.

Six months after Horton became Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches official statements made it known to the world that the Battle of the Atlantic had taken a very great turn in favour of the United Nations—that shipping losses had been reduced below the most optimistic forecast and that crippling losses had been inflicted on the U-boats.

SIR ARTHUR LUMLEY ST. GEORGE LYSTER

K.C.B., C.V.O., C.B.E., D.S.O.

Vice-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

"*Illustrious* from Commander-in-Chief—Manœuvre well executed." It was November 12th, 1940, and the aircraft-carrier *Illustrious* was rejoining the fleet after the epic attack on Taranto when the Yeoman of Signals read the flags fluttering at the yard arm of the flagship H.M.S. *Warspite*.

The *Illustrious* was wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral A. L. St. G. Lyster, the Rear-Admiral Commanding Aircraft Carriers.

The "manœuvre" had been well executed. The *Illustrious* and her Fleet Air Arm aircraft had, with one stroke, changed the whole aspect of the war in the Mediterranean. Until the night of November 11th, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief, had been in a position of considerable numerical and material disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the Italian fleet. That night the aircraft of the *Illustrious* had more than evened the odds. They had made Cunningham master of the Mediterranean.

Lyster had made history. Never before had an aircraft carrier attacked, with its aircraft, a great fleet lying in a heavily defended anchorage. He and his ship's company and his naval air crews had shown the world what could be done, and what crippling losses could be inflicted on the enemy by such an attack.

The idea of the attack had germinated when Lyster was commanding the aircraft carrier *Glorious* with the Mediterranean Fleet in 1938, and war with Italy appeared imminent.

Admiral Lyster and Captain D. W. Boyd, the captain of the *Illustrious*, were enthusiasts, with great faith in the power of naval shipborne aircraft to seek out the enemy in the fancied security of his harbours and launch a sudden, unexpected, and devastating attack. They worked out probabilities and possibilities and formed their ideas of how it could be done.

Thus, when the *Illustrious* arrived in the Mediterranean on September 1st, 1940, and Sir Andrew Cunningham asked when the

Italian fleet could be attacked in Taranto, it was not long before the plans were laid before the Commander-in-Chief.

Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham heartily approved, but the time was not then ripe. Other things needed to be done by the *Illustrious*, and in the meantime the essential preliminaries to an attack on a defended port, such as a series of photographic reconnaissances, could go forward.

Thus Lyster's first blow against the enemy in the Mediterranean fell upon Rhodes, the historic island in the Dodecanese which was one of the chief Axis air bases on the flank of the eastern route to Malta. Flying from the *Illustrious* and the *Eagle*, Swordfish aircraft—called "stringbags" by their crews, more in affection than in contempt—"knocked seven bells out of" the two great Axis air bases at Rhodes. Hangars, barracks, workshops, and dispersed aircraft were destroyed or left in flames, while runways were made useless by being pitted with craters. The Regia Aeronautica and the luckless Italian army units detailed to protect the air bases were given good cause to appreciate the fact that the Mediterranean Fleet aircraft carriers had assumed a strength and dignity warranting, for the first time, the wearing of the flag of a Rear-Admiral Commanding the aircraft carriers.

It is not too much to say that the arrival in the Mediterranean of Rear-Admiral Lyster in the *Illustrious* was a turning point of the war in that sea. Sir Andrew Cunningham's Mediterranean Fleet could move with much more freedom upon its manifold occasions now that it had with it a modern aircraft carrier. Up to that time the old aircraft carrier *Eagle* had done wonders, but even the *Eagle's* superlative best had not been enough.

So for some time Rear-Admiral Lyster worked with the fleet while it was covering the passage of important supply convoys to Malta. It soon became apparent that the Fulmar fighters from the *Illustrious* could, and did, make life very precarious for the "snooping" Italian Cant flying boats which had hitherto carried out reconnaissances and shadowed the fleet with comparative immunity. Moreover, the fighter cover provided for the fleet by the *Illustrious* gave the ships some degree of security in the many hundreds of air attacks to which they were subjected. It must be remembered that the whole of the eastern as well as the central Mediterranean was then straddled by enemy air bases in Italy, Sicily, Libya and the Dodecanese.

In October, Rear-Admiral Lyster was detached from the fleet with the aircraft carriers *Illustrious* and *Eagle* to carry out a further attack upon the enemy air bases in the Dodecanese. This time it was the heavily fortified island base of Leros which was selected as the target. The Swordfish aircraft from the two carriers delivered the attack on October 13th, and dropped ninety-two bombs on the hangars, workshops and fuel stores of the air base. The Italians were taken completely by surprise, and the sudden realisation of their vulnerability must be added to the material damage done when assessing the success of the raid.

All this time a close watch was being kept by reconnaissance aircraft, working from Malta, on the great Italian naval base at Taranto. Dozens of photographs were taken, and from them a complete knowledge of the defences—the positions of the barrage balloons, gun positions and anti-torpedo nets—was being built up.

When, at three o'clock on the morning of October 28th, 1940, Mussolini issued an ultimatum to Greece, he took a decision which led directly to half his battle fleet being put out of action at Taranto exactly a fortnight later. Britain had to help Greece, and the better to do so, establish an advanced base in Crete. These commitments, of course, entailed a great deal of sea traffic across the Eastern Mediterranean from Alexandria to the Aegean. The Italian navy—at that time much stronger than the fleet which Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham could dispose—lay on the flank of this new sea route. As such, it was a great potential danger, and one which it was urgently necessary to remove. The time had come to put into effect the plan on which Rear-Admiral Lyster and Captain Boyd had spent so much time.

Once again, however, other commitments of the aircraft carriers dictated a postponement, but it was at last possible to schedule the operation for the night of November 11th.

The Commander-in-Chief took the fleet to sea to cover the operation, and the ships sailed from Alexandria on November 6th. Unfortunately Rear-Admiral Lyster had only one aircraft carrier, the *Illustrious*. The old *Eagle* had suffered damage from near misses in bombing attacks and this, although not serious, prevented her from taking part. Some of her Swordfish and eight of her air crews were, however, transferred to the *Illustrious* before sailing.

For nearly two days the fleet steamed westward unmolested and apparently undetected. Then, on November 8th, seven Italian S79

bombers approached. They were promptly set upon by Fulmars from the *Illustrious*, and two of the Italians were shot down. The remainder jettisoned their bombs in the sea and made off. Next day a Cant 506B shadower appeared, but it was soon shot down by Fulmar fighters.

Meanwhile, the reconnaissances over Taranto by the Royal Air Force from Malta were carried on almost ceaselessly. It was essential to know, right up to the last moment, which units of the Italian fleet were in Taranto and the exact positions in which they were moored. On the morning of November 11th an aircraft from the *Illustrious* fetched the latest reconnaissance photographs from Malta. That afternoon the Royal Air Force carried out a final reconnaissance to make sure that none of the Italian ships had left or shifted berth, and to make absolutely certain that the naval air crews would not find an empty harbour, the Royal Air Force patrolled the Gulf of Taranto for the remainder of that day, so that no ship could leave the harbour unobserved.

The latest photograph showed five Italian battleships in the outer harbour of Taranto—two of the new Littorio class, and three of the older but recently modernised Cavour class. These were lying partly sheltered by the Diga di Tarantola, a mole which stretches a mile and a half in an arc from the southern shore of the great outer harbour known as the Mar Grande. North-west of the end of the Diga di Tarantola lay three cruisers. These were within a pen of anti-torpedo nets. In the inner harbour, known as the Mar Piccolo, lay more cruisers and destroyers.

A thick balloon barrage was in operation all along the eastern side of the outer harbour and along the Diga di Tarantola. The western arm of the anti-torpedo nets was also guarded by a balloon barrage. The only possible ways into the anchorage for torpedo bombers, therefore, lay through the balloon barrage or from the north. The latter meant passing low over the town, where the defences were most formidable. The protection of the Italian fleet was certainly well conceived, for all it merited the Prime Minister's phrase, "inglorious shelter."

Bombers, raiding at night, do not usually fly in formation; they do not need to. Torpedo-carrying aircraft, on the other hand, must do so if their attacks are to be properly synchronised and therefore likely to be most effective.

The requirements of the operation, therefore, involved very

slow aircraft, heavily laden, flying through concentrated and well-planned defences and delivering their attacks in the face of violent opposition which could be expected from a combination of modern or modernised capital ships and shore defences. The naval air crews, however, thought nothing of the odds against them. They were out to make history, and determined to do so in no uncertain manner. And, had they needed any further incentive, they would have found it in a report from the Royal Air Force patrol on the afternoon of November 11th. Another Cavour class battleship had entered Taranto, so that the whole strength of the Italian battle fleet was awaiting their attention.

At 6 p.m. on November 11th, the *Illustrious*, supported by the Third Cruiser Squadron and four destroyers, was detached from the main fleet "to proceed in execution of previous orders." As the helms of the ships went over, the flagship signalled: "To Rear Admiral Lyster from Commander-in-Chief. Good luck to your lads in their enterprise. Their success may well have a most important bearing on the course of the war in the Mediterranean." Sir Andrew Cunningham continued on his course, covering the passage of a supply convoy to Malta, but his thoughts went with Rear-Admiral Lyster's force to the northward.

By eight o'clock that night Lyster's force was 170 miles from Taranto, and in the position from which it had been decided to launch the first attack. The aircraft of the first striking force were ranged on the flight deck, and while their engines were warming up Rear-Admiral Lyster personally wished good luck to each member of the air crews.

The first squadron began to take off at 8.35 p.m. It was a moonlight night, but every now and then the moon was veiled by thin cloud. In five minutes the whole of the first striking force was in the air, and the aircraft were forming up on their leader, Lieutenant-Commander K. Williamson, R.N. They flew off into the night, while on board the *Illustrious* the aircraft of the second striking force were brought up in the lifts and ranged on the flight desk.

Shortly before 11 p.m. the defences of Taranto heard the approaching aircraft and opened fire. Off the south-east corner of the Mar Grande two aircraft were detached from the striking force. These were the flare droppers. They flew up the east coast of the Mar Grande, dropping flares at half-mile intervals so that the ships



Vice-Admiral Sir A. L. St. G. Lyster

in the outer harbour would be silhouetted against the light for the benefit of attackers coming in from the south-west and north-west. Having dropped their flares, the flare droppers dived down through the balloon barrage and dive-bombed an oil storage depot. Then they returned to the *Illustrious*.

Four aircraft of the first striking force were detailed to attack targets in the Mar Piccolo with bombs. They dive-bombed cruisers and destroyers lying alongside the jetties and set the seaplane base on fire.

Meanwhile the torpedo-droppers were coming in to attack the battleships in the outer harbour.

The difficulties and dangers of carrying out a torpedo attack from the air on heavy ships in harbour have been well described by Lieutenant John Moore, R.N.V.R., himself a Fleet Air Arm pilot, in his book, *The Fleet Air Arm*, and he has given permission for the following to be quoted:

"A torpedo attack is difficult enough by day against a target in the open sea. It is many times more difficult at night, against ships in a defended harbour, and requires not only very steady nerves but extraordinarily good judgment. First the ships must be identified and your prearranged target kept in view throughout the steep dive; and the dive itself must be nicely judged so that it brings you down to water-level at the right place, giving you a clear run towards your target. You must miss the balloons as best you can, and take no notice of the flak at all. Then you must pull out of the dive at just the right torpedo-dropping height over the sea. Your altimeter will not tell you that; it is not sensitive enough, and besides has a time-lag, so that if you believed it you would fly right *into* the sea. You have to judge your height above the water by observed things; ripples, if they are visible, or harbour installations, or boats. Then you aim your aircraft straight at the target, steady her until she is flying absolutely straight and level (level in *both axes*, otherwise your torpedo will run crooked), and at last at the right range you press the release and the main part of your job is finished. There goes fifteen hundred pounds worth of complicated machinery, an 18-inch steel cylinder powered by a compressed air motor driving a propeller, with elaborate gyros and depth mechanism, and a load of powerful explosive in its nose. It travels through the water at about 42 knots and your observer may be able to watch its silvery track lengthening towards the target.

The pilot, though he feels the sudden strange buoyancy of the aircraft when the torpedo drops, scarcely ever sees the track; he is much too busy throwing the machine about and 'jinking' to avoid the A.A. fire: for if he is going to be shot down, this is the time they will get him—when he is flying straight into their barrage only a few feet above sea-level, or doing a steep climbing turn to escape and so exposing the whole of his belly to the guns.

"Modern battleships can put up a tremendous barrage both of light and heavy anti-aircraft fire; and that is why a torpedo attack, which necessitates going headlong at the barrage, is probably the most hazardous operation in the whole of flying.

"I doubt whether many of the air crews who attacked Taranto really expected to get away with it; for a moonlight torpedo-attack on battleships in a heavily defended harbour had never been attempted before. Yet, as it turned out, only two of the Swordfish were lost, most of their crews being taken prisoner. This was an extraordinarily low casualty-rate for what was probably one of the most dangerous flying operations of the war.

"Of course most of the aircraft were hit, and one, which got back to its carrier, had a shell-hole through its fuselage within three feet of the pilot's back. The explosion of the shell had turned the machine upside down in the air."

One sub-flight came in through the balloon barrage and low over the Diga di Tarantola and scored two torpedo hits on a Cavour class battleship. The other sub-flight came in over the torpedo nets and concentrated on the two Littorio class battleships. One of these was hit. The anti-aircraft fire had been most intense, but the first striking force returned to H.M.S. *Illustrious* with the loss of only one aircraft—that of its leader.

Meanwhile Rear-Admiral Lyster had despatched the second striking force. This was under the leadership of Lieutenant-Commander J. W. Hale, R.N.

While one aircraft of the second striking force was being ranged on the flight deck in the darkness, damage was caused to the fabric of one wing. It was rushed below to the hangar for urgent repairs, while its crew entreated Captain Boyd to let them go as soon as their aircraft was ready, although they had no hope of being able to take off with the rest of the striking force. The crew of this aircraft had had a previous adventure that day. During the forenoon they had been on reconnaissance when they had had to make

a forced landing in the sea. Fortunately they did so close to the cruiser *Gloucester*, and were picked up. They importuned the Captain of the *Gloucester* to be sent back to the *Illustrious* at once so that they could take part in the attack on Taranto, and the Captain of the *Gloucester* had them flown back to the aircraft carrier in the *Gloucester's* Walrus amphibian. Captain Boyd consented to allow this crew to take off as soon as their aircraft was ready, though by that time the second striking force had been gone a quarter of an hour.

The second striking force followed the same tactics as the first, although they were short by two aircraft—the belated one and one other which had been forced to return to the carrier owing to a mishap. The remainder arrived at Taranto at 11.50 p.m.

The torpedo-bombers concentrated on the two Littorio class battleships, coming in to the attack across the heavy defences of the town. The oil depot and the ships in the Mar Piccolo were bombed at the same time. The belated aircraft, when it arrived on the scene, saw that one of the battleships in the outer harbour was blazing furiously. Then he went on and bombed the cruisers and destroyers in the Mar Piccolo.

One aircraft from the striking force was lost—it was one which had been sent over to the *Illustrious* from the *Eagle*—but all the rest safely regained the carrier. By 2.50 a.m. on November 12th all the aircraft had landed on, and Rear-Admiral Lyster turned his force to the southward to rejoin the Commander-in-Chief.

“Manœuvre well executed.” Photographic reconnaissance of Taranto carried out on November 12th by the Royal Air Force showed the extent of this understatement. One of the new Littorio class battleships was so badly damaged that her bows were awash. One of the smaller and older battleships was aground forward, with her stern and the starboard side of her upper deck under water. Another of these ships had been so damaged that she had had to be beached. In the inner harbour cruisers and destroyers had been severely damaged by bombs. Eleven aircraft torpedoes had crippled half the Italian battle fleet, for some months at least, while bombs had reduced the effective Italian strength in cruisers and destroyers. The Navy’s new weapon, the Fleet Air Arm, had been called upon to redress the balance of sea-power in the Mediterranean, and well and truly had it done its duty. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham no longer faced superior numerical and material forces, and the

convoys would pass between Alexandria and Crete and Greece without much fear of interference from the Italian fleet.

Almost exactly two months later the German air force appeared in the Mediterranean. It had been forced to leave other theatres of war in order to bolster up the failing Italian fortunes.

On January 10th, 1941, the *Illustrious* was part of the fleet covering the passage of a convoy to Malta. The aircraft carrier was still wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Lyster.

The fleet was about 100 miles from Malta, and the *Illustrious* was just flying off reliefs for the Fulmars and Swordfish on patrol, when a large formation of forty to fifty Junkers 87 and 88 dive-bombers appeared. They singled out the *Illustrious* as their main target, and the skill and determination with which the attack was pressed home proclaimed that the German "first eleven" had arrived in the Mediterranean.

The great aircraft carrier disappeared in a great wall of water from the splashes of bombs bursting close to her. When the water subsided it was plain that not all the bombs had hit the water. The *Illustrious* was hauling out of line, badly damaged and heavily on fire, and some of her guns had been put out of action.

While men fought the fires on board and did what they could for the wounded, the crews of the undamaged guns fought back at the Luftwaffe, while above, the naval fighter pilots smashed again and again at the German formations. Two naval fighter pilots, when they had exhausted their ammunition, continued to dive in dummy attacks on the enemy to put them off their aim.

Lyster's flagship, grievously damaged, but fighting back with everything that remained in action, turned and headed for Malta. Destroyers gathered round her to give her what protection they could.

Then, with flight-deck wrecked and fires raging between decks, another disaster befell the ship. Her steering gear broke down due to the damage. She had to be steered by adjusting the speed of her engines—no easy matter in a badly damaged ship with an ever-increasing list due to the quantity of water which was being poured into her in the attempt to keep the fires under control.

Men made sallies into one section of the hangar, which was badly on fire and heavily damaged, irrespective of the fact that stored aircraft with full petrol tanks threatened to explode at any moment. They succeeded in keeping the fire within bounds. Down

below men were fighting to keep the water away from the dynamos. In the boiler-rooms the draught fans were pouring down thick smoke and fumes from chemical fire extinguishers. Men had to breathe through wet cloths, gasping for every breath, but steam had to be maintained at all costs.

More determined air attacks were delivered on the damaged carrier, but they were fought off. For some of the time the ship was completely out of control. She reached Malta, however, against all the laws of probabilities, after seven hours of attacks, only to be determinedly attacked again while in harbour.

The official report on this incident shows that the ship was saved by coolness and determination. It reads:

"From the fact that the ship was saved and brought into harbour it is evident that the entire ship's organisation, the centralised control of damage and the initiative and energy shown by all was of a very high order.

"The ship suffered damage in four of the ten attacks carried out on her at sea and in Malta. The two final attacks were on a very large scale, with at least fifty aircraft in each, but these only scored one hit owing to the determined manner in which the guns were fought.

"The engine-room and repair parties saved a valuable ship after severe damage and in difficult conditions.

"Seventy bombs fell in the immediate vicinity of the ship during the four large-scale attacks."

Despite the determined efforts of the enemy to give the aircraft carrier a final knock-out blow in Malta, temporary repairs were effected under almost continuous air raids, and the *Illustrious* then slipped away to Alexandria under her own steam. She went on to the United States to be fully repaired, and Rear-Admiral Lyster left her. While wearing his flag she had attained a notable place in history.

Lyster's connection with aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean was far from finished. By August, 1942, he had hoisted his flag in the new aircraft carrier *Victorious*, and in the middle of that month he commanded the aircraft carriers which played so important a part in fighting through to Malta the great convoy whose close escort was commanded by Rear-Admiral Burroughs.

Without Lyster's aircraft carriers that convoy might never have reached the Sicilian channel, let alone Malta. The scale of enemy air

attack was very heavy, but the great majority of the convoy got through. Right at the outset Lyster was deprived of one aircraft carrier by the loss by U-boat attack of the gallant old *Eagle*. Nevertheless, the Fleet Air Arm, as usual, played rather more than their share, and when the convoy arrived at Malta it was possible to say that naval carrier-borne aircraft had certainly destroyed thirty-nine enemy aircraft, probably destroyed a further five, and so damaged nine more that they were officially assessed as "possibly destroyed."

Rear-Admiral Lyster's aircraft carriers were showing themselves more and more as essential units of the fleet.

When the Allied Forces landed in French North Africa in November, 1942, the only air support they had during this hazardous undertaking was that provided by naval aircraft flying from Lyster's carriers. The Fleet Air Arm not only protected the ships and the troops, they raided and neutralised the air bases from which opposition was to be expected, and paved the way for the Royal Air Force to move in and take over. General Eisenhower, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, was very sensible of the part played by Rear-Admiral Lyster's aircraft carriers, and he paid a special tribute in his despatch to their work and that of the naval air crews who flew from them.

Although Lyster is now pre-eminently an aircraft-carrier man, he originally specialised in gunnery, and it was for his work as gunnery officer of the light cruiser *Cassandra* in the last war that he was awarded the D.S.O. He was made a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1936, when he was in command of the gun carriage for the funeral of King George V. In this war he was mentioned in despatches for his work in the Narvik area during the Norwegian campaign; was made a C.B. for the attack on Taranto in 1940, and a C.B.E. for his handling of the aircraft carriers guarding the famous Malta convoy of August, 1942. In the Birthday Honours of 1943 Lyster became a K.C.B.

Lyster's first connection with the Fleet Air Arm was in December, 1937, when he took command of the aircraft carrier *Glorious*. Since giving up that command in July, 1939, he served at the Admiralty, and at Scapa Flow from after the sinking of the *Royal Oak* until the Norwegian campaign in April, 1940. After the end of the Norwegian campaign he returned to Scapa Flow, and hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *Illustrious* in command of the aircraft carriers of the Mediterranean Fleet. He returned to England in March,

1941, and became Fifth Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Air Services in April, 1941.

Lyster left the Admiralty in July, 1942, and hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *Victorious* in command of the aircraft carriers of the Home Fleet. His flag was transferred from H.M.S. *Victorious* to H.M.S. *Indomitable* in December, 1942.

Lyster is a hard man—a “tough egg”—with a sardonic sense of humour, but an extraordinarily good man to serve under. There is nothing equivocal about him. With him you know exactly where you are, and he has a gift for knowing and understanding the problems and troubles of his subordinates.

LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN

G.C.V.O., D.S.O., A.D.C.

Captain, Royal Navy; Acting-Admiral

LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN was for some time Chief of Combined Operations. In the olden days the title might have been "Master of the Offensive." That would have been more picturesque, and also more descriptive.

He is known as "Dickie" Mountbatten in the Royal Navy, and he is certainly a man of parts, combining imagination with professional ability. He is one of the foremost wireless experts of the Navy, is an inventor who has been blessed by hundreds of destroyer captains and signalmen, is a qualified interpreter in French and German, and an officer who has seen a great deal more of the war at sea than most.

Just before the war Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten was "standing by" the destroyer flotilla leader *Kelly*, then being completed at the Tyneside yard of Messrs. Hawthorne Leslie. The *Kelly* was in many ways an exceptional ship. She was one of the first British destroyers to be built on the "longitudinal" rather than the "transverse" system—a fact which was to save her life very early in her service. She was destined for service in the Mediterranean. The builders were, of course, immensely proud of the ship. They put into her construction everything that skill and care could devise, and, as a final touch, they coated her hull and her upper works with beautiful glossy enamel. The *Kelly* was a first lieutenant's dream when she left the Tyne.

Out of the pride of builders and ship's company was born a mutual friendship which led to close study of her construction by Mountbatten and his officers and men. It was to serve them and the ship in good stead.

The war clouds were fast gathering when the *Kelly*, with Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten on her bridge as "Captain D.," commanding the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, sailed from the Tyne. The normal programme allowed for three weeks at Chatham. Urgency decreed that those three weeks should be compressed into



The Lord Louis Mountbatten

three days and nights of feverish activity. Then the *Kelly* sailed for Portland to "work up."

The *Kelly* was at sea doing exercises when the galvanising signal "Fuze all shell, fit warheads on all torpedoes" was received. The state of emergency had entered its final stage. Back to harbour steamed the beautiful new destroyer, and then came a task which would in normal times have broken sailors' hearts—the beautiful glossy enamel had to be overlaid by dull paint. Like everything else in those days, it had to be done in a hurry. "All hands and the cook" were slung over the side on painting stages, and among them Mountbatten and his officers, clad in paint-stained boiler suits like their men.

After "divisions" and prayers on Sunday morning, September 3rd, Lord Louis Mountbatten was explaining to his ship's company the working and use of the Mountbatten station-keeper—one of his inventions—when a signalman brought in a pad. He nodded to the signalman and went on talking. Then he paused.

"At this stage in my lecture I usually point out how valuable the automatic station-keeper would be in war, when the captain and other officers on the bridge have so many things to do besides keeping the ship in station on the other ships of the flotilla. Now we shall be able to prove that for ourselves as we are at war with Germany."

That is how "Dickie" Mountbatten gave his ship's company the news which the signalman had brought.

The *Kelly* still had some "working up" practices to do at Portland. It was during one of these that two torpedoes were seen by some of her ship's company and by the vessel with which the *Kelly* was exercising. They missed, owing to the instinctive avoiding action taken by the *Kelly*. They must have been among the first torpedoes fired by a U-boat in this war, and the incident brought a sudden sense of reality to the rushed happenings which were sweeping a new ship and a new ship's company inexorably along in their wake.

There followed a period of U-boat hunting in the Western Approaches, during which one or two promising depth charge attacks were carried out, although they never produced the incontrovertible evidence required by the Admiralty before assessing a "kill." Then the *Kelly* went north to join the Home Fleet. A few weeks later she began to suffer from one of those diseases to which

the frail hulls of destroyers, housing immensely powerful engines, fall heir from time to time. Salt water was found to be seeping into the boiler feed water tanks. This necessitated a return visit to Hawthorne Leslie's yard at the Tyne, and docking. It was not a big job and was quickly put right.

When the *Kelly*, her hull tight again, was due to leave the Tyne, the presence of a U-boat was suspected off the entrance to the river, where two merchant ships had been blown up. The *Kelly* was told to investigate, and was doing so when there was a bump against her bottom under the bridge. A second or two later there was another bump—this time under the wardroom. Then, with a terrific explosion, a mine exploded about six feet clear of her stern. That the *Kelly* had hit that mine twice was established beyond doubt from marks on her hull when she was docked. That it had not exploded under the bridge or under the wardroom was a miracle. Had it done so it would have been the end of the *Kelly*. As it was, her stern was lifted several feet. The constructors worked out that her hull had "whipped" over four feet. Water was forced through her plating joints between the rivets, but not a single rivet had yielded to the strain, and practically no damage had been done.

An afternoon in May, 1940, found Lord Louis Mountbatten on the bridge of the *Kelly* steering east across the North Sea. With him were other destroyers, and the cruiser *Birmingham* was one of the force. This force was one of two which were sweeping to the eastwards in the hope of rounding up German minelayers which were known to be busy on the eastern side of the North Sea. The weather was calm, and as evening came down the visibility became patchy, with banks of mist. It was, in fact, such an evening as experience has since taught us to be ideal for the German E-boats—craft which up to that time had not put in an appearance in this war.

Early in the evening aircraft reported a U-boat ahead. The *Birmingham* altered course to keep clear, while the *Kelly* and *Kandahar* were detached to hunt the U-boat. Almost at the same time, the destroyer *Bulldog* was detached to sink a floating mine.

Search did not immediately establish the presence of a U-boat. Meanwhile a report of the German minelaying squadron had been received, so the two destroyers abandoned the hunt and made haste

to try to rejoin the rest of the force before contact was made with the enemy.

At 10.45 that evening, just as it was getting dark, those on the bridge of the *Kelly* sighted for a moment a blurred object shrouded in the mist about 600 yards away on the beam. Simultaneously the track of a torpedo was seen. It passed right under the bridge.

"Damn lucky that went under us." The words were hardly out of "Dickie" Mountbatten's mouth when there was a shattering explosion. The first torpedo, the track of which had been seen, had passed under the *Kelly*. The second torpedo had hit amidships, in the foremost boiler room. The force of that explosion, the gigantic flash, and the disappearance of the *Kelly* in a cloud of smoke and steam is best described by the fact that the *Kandahar*, following a cable and a half—300 yards—astern at over 30 knots, thought that the *Kelly* had completely disintegrated and that she had passed over her wreck, as the *Princess Royal* had passed over the wreck of the *Queen Mary* at the Battle of Jutland. The officer of the watch in the *Kandahar* was Lieutenant the Marquess of Milford Haven, Mountbatten's nephew.

H.M.S. *Bulldog*, who had sunk the floating mine and was joining up with the other two destroyers, was several cables farther astern. Had she not been it would have been assumed that the *Kelly* had been blown up and lost with all hands. As it was, the smoke and steam of the explosion subsided just as the *Bulldog* came abreast, and she saw the *Kelly* lying waterlogged and crippled, low in the water and with a heavy list to starboard.

The *Kelly's* foremost boiler room had been blown open to the sea, and every man in it had been killed instantaneously. The boiler farther aft had been forced off its bed by the force of the explosion. The starboard side plating amidships, from keel to deck, no longer existed. The ship's freeboard was reduced to inches. It was in this plight that "Dickie" Mountbatten's knowledge of the construction and capabilities of his ship, acquired while she was building, served him well. Within four minutes of the explosion, and long before any communications had been established, the torpedo officer went to the tubes and fired the torpedoes. Another officer jettisoned the depth charges—set to "safe," as their explosions would un doubtedly have finished the *Kelly*. Men threw overboard the "ready-use" ammunition at the guns. Thus rid of a considerable amount of top weight, the *Kelly* rode somewhat easier. No attempt had been

made to correct her trim by the accepted method of flooding compartments in order to compensate for those open to the sea. Had this been attempted the ship must have sunk.

In the darkness and the gathering fog H.M.S. *Bulldog* achieved a feat of seamanship seldom equalled. It must be remembered that the *Kelly* had no power on her capstan and there was no possibility of utilising even a wire hawser from that ship. Yet the *Kelly* was in tow of the *Bulldog* inside three-quarters of an hour; the commanding officer of the *Bulldog* declining absolutely to consider the danger of further attack by the German E-boats.

Meanwhile deeds of great heroism were being enacted on board the *Kelly*, which was behaving more like a waterlogged dugout canoe than one of His Majesty's ships of war. The wounded were got up on deck and laid on the port side, where the water was at least more than six inches from them. There were, of course, no lights whatever in the ship, and torches had to be used with the greatest care, since to give away the position of the ship would be to invite further attack by the E-boats which were probably still in the vicinity.

An eighteen-year-old telegraphist forced his way through a small hole to the main wireless office and gave morphia injections to the five wounded men in that compartment. He knew that if the ship sank, as she threatened to do at any moment, he would be trapped and drowned. On deck, the Surgeon-Lieutenant, without light and with most inadequate supplies of fresh warm water, worked near-miracles.

The fog; the agony of a stricken ship, immobilised, helpless and in danger of sinking, but succoured by a consort regardless of risk; the uncomplaining fortitude of the wounded; the tireless efforts of the unhurt to save their ship; all these gave to that night a niche in the great edifice of British naval tradition.

Lord Louis Mountbatten knew that his ship was mortally wounded, and that she was on the wrong side of the North Sea. He had seen her built and knew much of her strength, but he knew that never before had a destroyer suffered such injury and been brought safely to port. Nevertheless, he never lost faith nor wavered in determination. He was "Captain D.," commanding the flotilla, not captain of the ship, yet it never occurred to him to transfer to H.M.S. *Bulldog* and leave the *Kelly*.

The *Kelly* was in tow of the *Bulldog* when she was nearly run

down by the cruiser *Birmingham*, returning from the sweep against the German minelayers. The fog was thick, and those in the *Birmingham* were quite unaware that they had nearly rammed the *Kelly*, but Mountbatten and his men thought for the second time that night that the *Kelly's* last moments had come.

Nor was this the last incident of the night. Shortly after midnight both the *Bulldog* and the *Kelly* actually were rammed. This time it was a German E-boat, travelling at about 40 knots. It hit the *Bulldog* on the quarter and rode up on to her deck. The gunner of the *Bulldog*, who was aft at the time, swears that it slid off the deck down the towing wire. In any case, the E-boat seemed to cannon off the *Bulldog*, was hit by the *Kelly's* bows, and went roaring down the *Kelly's* starboard side, her engines still going full speed ahead. It hit the *Kelly* again amidships, where the destroyer had practically no freeboard, and rode up on to her deck. It then swept aft, carrying away the destroyer's whaler, motor boat, guard rails, and even so stout a fitting as the torpedo davit. Then it rolled off astern, and from the large pieces of its hull which were ripped off on the *Kelly's* deck fittings there is no doubt that it must have sunk like a stone. Its German crew seemed panic-stricken. They were yelling like maniacs as their boat bumped from one destroyer to another, but after it slid off the deck of the *Kelly* there was silence.

Early in the morning the *Kandahar* appeared. She was surprised to see the *Kelly*, thinking that she had been blown to pieces and lost with all hands. She ran her bows against the *Kelly's* quarter so that the canted after-superstructure of the listing ship came close to her forecastle deck. Thus were the *Kelly's* wounded transferred to the *Kandahar*.

Before this feat of seamanship had been completed the Luftwaffe took a hand, but the German aircraft were beaten off by gunfire from the ships and by three Hudson aircraft of the R.A.F. Coastal Command which put in a timely appearance. All the German bombs fell wide.

At intervals during that Saturday, while the *Kelly* laboured in tow, yawing almost unmanageably because of her heavy list, the German aircraft tried to finish her off. Early in the day two more destroyers came to stand by her, and later two cruisers, and never once did a German airman succeed in dropping a bomb close enough to increase her damage. During that afternoon Mountbatten had the melancholy duty of reading the burial service over those of the

dead whose bodies had been recovered, volleys of rifle fire cracking out as each shotted hammock slid overboard with the remains of a brave shipmate.

Late in the day the *Kelly's* list began to increase, and it seemed certain that she would founder. It was decided, therefore, to take off all except eighteen officers and men, including "Captain D."—just sufficient to man the serviceable armament and tend the ship in tow.

The transfer of the rest of the crew was done in boats, and while this was being done the heaviest bombing attack of the day developed. It was an unpleasant interlude, but the aircraft were eventually driven off without having scored any hits.

The weather, however, threatened to accomplish what the Luftwaffe had failed to do. The waterlogged *Kelly* was "working badly" in a rising sea. Distorted frames and buckled steel plates were complaining bitterly against the strain. Finally it was decided to abandon the *Kelly* for the night, since she could not again be got in tow, and lay motionless, a sitting target for enemy torpedoes. Two U-boats had been reported ten miles ahead.

All night the *Kelly* lay rolling and abandoned, while her flotilla mates patrolled for her protection. In the morning she was boarded again, and only then was it realised that she had not been abandoned by every living thing. The boarding party was met by the ship's cat, unaccountably left behind on the previous evening.

That morning two tugs, which had hastened to sea, took the *Kelly* in tow. Their task was difficult, for the sea rose again, and waves were sluicing through and over the stricken destroyer, which was becoming more and more sluggish in her movements. Nor did the intermittent attention of the German bombers help matters. They bombed with greater accuracy than on the previous day, but they did not hit and did no damage.

So passed Sunday, and Sunday night, and most of Monday. At last, on the Monday afternoon, the *Kelly* was brought safely to the Tyne where she had been so stoutly built. The workers did not regard her as another unexpected and difficult job thrown upon their already overburdened shoulders. They cheered her as she was towed up river.

Then followed the most critical months in the history of Great Britain. The surrender of Belgium; the evacuation from Dunkirk; the collapse of France; the enemy's seizure of the whole western

coastline of Europe; and the imminent danger of German invasion of a Britain whose war potential lay scattered over a conquered France and Belgium.

The emergency found Lord Louis Mountbatten, still "Captain D." of the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla. This flotilla became a sort of roving striking force, and was moved from one part of the coast to another to meet any immediate threat. First it was based on the Humber. There Mountbatten and his staff lived ashore, although they went to sea on all operations. They sent such destroyers as were available up and down the coast with convoys, and strove always to keep in readiness a force to sally forth against the invaders which they thought must surely come. Mountbatten and his staff were ever ready to do a "pier-head jump" into any available ship when the alarm sounded. In the meantime they had much to do, stretching the available men and material to cover a host of deficiencies. So serious were matters on the English east coast in those days that a machine-gun was kept mounted and manned at the head of the stairs leading to "Captain D.'s" office.

Lord Louis commanded a destroyer flotilla, but all manner of other tasks came his way. By virtue of the situation of his headquarters he became, to all intents and purposes, in charge of the defences—such as they were—of that section of the "invasion coast." Groups of soldiers arrived from time to time and asked the naval authorities "What do we do now?" Defences were improvised and the soldiers told to man them. Coast defence batteries were set up, using any old guns which happened to be available. Among them were the 4-inch guns of the old *Lion*, Admiral Beatty's flagship, which had been Mountbatten's first ship. He had joined her in 1916.

It was an anxious and a tiring time; a time in which able men with initiative had to shoulder unexpected and entirely unofficial responsibilities.

At last, however, the immediate danger of invasion passed. In its place there arose a new danger to our vital sea communications at the great focal point of maritime trade off the entrance to the English and St. George's Channels.

The Fifth Destroyer Flotilla was accordingly moved to Devonport, where it was from time to time reinforced by cruisers.

Mountbatten established headquarters ashore, so organised that he and his staff could embark in any ship within minutes of emer-

be allowed to land in Crete. We must not let the Army down. Stick it out." The Army was not let down, despite a grievous toll of ships and men. No enemy seaborne landing took place until the enemy's airborne invasion had assumed such proportions that it was decided that the island could not be held.

Everybody from the Commander-in-Chief to the newest joined Ordinary Seaman knew that losses were inevitable. They knew that they would have to work by day as well as night close to air bases where the enemy had concentrated the best of the Luftwaffe, and that they could expect no fighter protection while so doing, but every man resolved to do his damndest.

The first German attempt at seaborne invasion of Crete was made on the night of Wednesday, May 21st. It was defeated by Rear-Admiral Glennie's light cruisers, which intercepted a German troop convoy, escorted by Italian destroyers. The Italian destroyers fired a few torpedoes, none of which took effect, and turned tail. Glennie's cruisers caught one and sank her, and then turned their attention to the convoy. Ships were torpedoed or sunk by gunfire—small vessels were shelled out of existence or rammed. The glare of burning ships and the beams of searchlights showed German soldiers in heavy equipment throwing themselves overboard to escape the fury of the British guns. Thus the enemy's first attempt at seaborne invasion ended in a costly disaster for the enemy.

Regardless of loss, the enemy tried again next day, May 22nd. This time it was Rear-Admiral King's cruisers which dashed in broad daylight into the waters close to the enemy airfields. The Luftwaffe did its best. The *Naiad* had 191 bombs aimed at her, but escaped undamaged. Other ships were not so fortunate, but the enemy convoy was dispersed and thrown into confusion, and many of its ships sunk. The Navy lost heavily that day, but the second attempt at seaborne invasion had been repelled with heavy loss.

The ships of the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten in the *Kelly*, were here, there, and everywhere, doing the countless jobs for which destroyers are so invaluable. Two ships of that flotilla—the *Kingston* and *Kandahar*—succeeded in rescuing, by night, eighty per cent of the crew of the cruiser *Fiji*, sunk by dive-bombers during the afternoon.

General Freyberg asked that the enemy occupied aerodrome at

Maleme and enemy positions in its vicinity should be bombarded during the night of May 22nd. Lord Louis Mountbatten led the *Kelly* and *Kashmir*, which were to provide this artillery preparation for a desperate assault by an army without artillery.

As Lord Louis took his ships towards their bombarding position in pitch darkness, he saw two other ships creeping in towards the shore. They were the remains of the convoy which Admiral King's force had scattered during the day.

The *Kelly* and *Kashmir* dashed in and opened fire on these ships at close range. One of them was a crowded troopship. Mountbatten and his men saw German soldiers throwing themselves overboard in full equipment before their ship sank. The other ship must have been laden with ammunition. She was set on fire and there was a series of spectacular explosions and firework displays as the ammunition "went up." The enemy's third attempt to effect a seaborne landing had ended in disaster.

Dawn was already near, and, after a brief bombardment of the enemy positions around Maleme, Lord Louis set about extricating his ships at high speed.

At 5.30 that morning the *Kelly* and *Kashmir* were attacked by high-level bombers. These attacks lasted for two and a half hours and hundreds of bombs were dropped, but the destroyers dodged them all.

At eight o'clock the attack was taken up by twenty-four German Stukas, which attacked in waves, diving down in quick succession to between 300 and 500 feet before loosing their bombs. All the bombs from the first two waves missed. Then a 1000-pound bomb hit the *Kashmir* just abaft the funnel. She broke in two and sank in a couple of minutes. The *Kelly* went on dodging. To stop while the attack was still in progress would have meant losing the *Kelly* as well.

Shortly afterwards, however, the *Kelly* was hit—a 1000-pounder abaft the engine-room. At that moment the *Kelly* was steaming at well over 30 knots and was heeling over under full helm in an attempt to dodge the bombs.

All that Lord Louis could see from the bridge was the flying debris from the explosion; the torn ship's side plating being buckled back by the force of the water; a JU 87 diving into the sea, and another wave of dive-bombers coming down. Instinctively, he bent to the voice pipe and yelled: "Whatever happens, keep the

guns firing." As he looked down at the decks he regretted having given a totally unnecessary order. Not a man had left his post and every gun was firing harder than ever before.

The strain of the *Kelly's* speed and helm, and the action of the water on the buckled plates were more than the stability of the stricken ship could stand. Fifty seconds after being hit, she capsized. As she went over, men were literally washed away from the guns they were still struggling to fight. One young seaman of seventeen was washed away still clasping a belt of ammunition which he was striving to load into his gun. "Dickie" Mountbatten's last foothold on the bridge of the *Kelly* was on his own invention—the "Mountbatten station-keeper."

Down in the engine-room of the *Kelly* happened something that might be regarded as almost a miracle. The Engineer-Commander and his men were all at their posts at the manœuvring valves when the ship capsized. Somehow—not one of the men who escaped can say how—the Engineer-Commander, another engineer officer and two ratings found themselves standing on the underside of the steel platform at the top of the ladder from the floor plates. A few seconds before this had been above their heads. Below their feet was the hatch leading to the ship's deck. It was under water, but the speed of the ship—she was still travelling at between 12 and 15 knots although bottom up—had formed a gigantic bubble outside the hatch. The four men climbed down through the hatch into this bubble of air beneath the capsized and sinking ship. They got clear, but two of them died afterwards.

The upper-deck personnel, who had been washed off into the water, saw the *Kelly's* screws, still racing at full speed in the air, pass over their heads. A few seconds later the ship took her final plunge.

While the men in the water were swimming and clinging to rafts and pieces of wreckage the German airmen committed the beastly crime of machine-gunning them, and two men swimming in the water were wounded.

For three and a half hours Mountbatten and his men struggled for survival, their eyes, noses and ears clogged by the oil fuel which floated thickly on the surface. Then the *Kipling*, of the same flotilla, came on the scene.

The *Kipling* should have accompanied the *Kelly* and *Kashmir* for the bombardment of the Maleme area, but a defect to her steering

gear had delayed her. She had effected temporary repairs, but had then struck a wreck or some other submerged obstacle and suffered further minor damage. Had it not been for these accidents she would probably have been sunk with the *Kelly* and *Kashmir*, and the crews of all three ships would almost certainly have been lost.

As it was, the *Kipling* picked up the survivors of the *Kelly* and *Kashmir*. On her way back to Alexandria, laden with survivors, incapable of full speed, and with her steering gear still unreliable, the *Kipling* was repeatedly bombed, but she came through.

Throughout these attacks, Mountbatten, unmindful of his recent experiences, stayed on the bridge, giving advice when it was asked for, but never interfering in the Commanding Officer's handling of the ship.

A few days later Lord Louis flew home to England carrying Admiral Cunningham's preliminary report of the Battle of Crete.

In July, 1941, Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed temporarily to the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Victorious* in order to gain experience of this type of ship before taking command of her sister-ship, the *Illustrious*, then being repaired in the United States after having been damaged in a Malta convoy operation. A month later Lord Louis crossed the Atlantic and took command of H.M.S. *Illustrious*.

In the United States Lord Louis proved himself no mean ambassador, a task in which he was helped by Lady Mountbatten, who was at that time touring the United States in her capacity of Superintendent-in-Chief of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. Here was a young man of great personality who had seen and done things and could talk of his experiences entertainingly and convincingly. Technicians and dockyard workmen took him to their hearts just as surely as others of a nation not yet at war but anxious to understand and to help.

It was something of a joke in the United States that *everything* seemed to happen to Lord Louis Mountbatten. Even when he was ceremoniously receiving, on behalf of the crew of the *Illustrious*, the traditional American naval mascot—a goat—it bit him.

After two months in the *Illustrious*, Lord Louis was recalled to England "to take up a special appointment with the rank of Commodore." The nature of the appointment was kept secret, but it soon became known that Lord Louis Mountbatten was to become Commodore of Combined Operations.

When, shortly afterwards, the head of Combined Operations became a member of the Chief of Staff's Committee—the real executive which runs the war—Lord Louis's title was changed to Chief of Combined Operations. The importance of the command and the interdependence of the three Services within it were marked by an announcement without precedent. Lord Louis became an Acting Vice-Admiral, an Honorary Lieutenant-General, and an Honorary Air Marshal.

"Dickie" Mountbatten, therefore, became a Vice-Admiral at the age of forty-one. Beatty had been made a Vice-Admiral at forty-four, and Nelson at forty-three. The promotion was necessary, but by no means all to Mountbatten's advantage. He has, in effect, been lifted out of his generation, and unless he can revert to the rank of Captain and be given a command at sea his subsequent naval career may be cut unduly short.

The chief functions of the Combined Operations Command are training, planning, and development—forging the weapon to strike at the enemy.

The training activities of the Combined Operations Command increased enormously while Lord Louis was C.C.O. (as he was called for short). This was inevitable when larger and larger combined operations, culminating in the invasion of Europe on a grand scale, were contemplated. Where a few specially trained men were necessary to raid a limited objective, hundreds of thousands are required for the landing of armies on hostile coasts.

The essence of success in combined operations lies in the delivery of the troops at the right place and at the right time under conditions in which yards and seconds count, and where the slightest error will almost certainly lead to failure and the loss of many lives.

The development of equipment, and particularly of landing craft for men and vehicles, and assault ships, is yet another duty devolving upon the Combined Operations Command.

While Mountbatten was Chief of Combined Operations, the size and scope of combined operations increased. This was the inevitable accompaniment and demonstration of the United Nations moving more and more from the defensive to the offensive.

At the end of December, 1941, about two months after Lord Louis went to the Combined Operations Command, a raid took place against shipping and other objectives at Vaagso, in the Bergen

area of the Norwegian coast. The care and accuracy of its planning was shown by the arrival, after a long passage across the North Sea, of all the seaborne and airborne units within one minute of the time scheduled. The execution of the plans by those on the spot was faultless and the raid was a great success.

The next big combined operation was that at St. Nazaire in March, 1942.

The object of this raid was to destroy the lock gates of the big St. Nazaire dock. This was the only dock on the French Atlantic coast which could accommodate the German battleship *Tirpitz*, which was lurking in a Norwegian fiord. A year before, her ill-fated sister-ship, *Bismarck*, had broken out into the Atlantic. She had been sighted, shadowed, and sunk as she was making for the sanctuary of the St. Nazaire dock. Destruction of that dock would ensure that no docking facilities would exist on the French Atlantic coast for the *Tirpitz*, and would at once circumscribe the movements and use of that great ship.

The raid was a brilliant success. The lock gates were utterly destroyed, and many other dock installations demolished. It had other values; it proved that it was possible for a force to make an undetected passage of over 400 miles through waters habitually patrolled by enemy aircraft, and for little ships to fight their way up a narrow channel six miles long in the face of the most determined opposition from highly efficient defences.

On August 19th, 1942, took place the great Dieppe raid. It was an operation of entirely different character to what had gone before. It was a "reconnaissance in force" against part of the enemy's coast known to be very heavily defended. Only by probing at a known strong point could accurate assessment be made of the enemy's coastal defences, and such an assessment was vital in formulating plans for invasion.

One of the most valuable lessons learnt at Dieppe was that, given adequate air support, ships could lie for many hours off a hostile coast in perfect weather without suffering great and crippling losses. At Dieppe our ships lay off the coast for the greater part of a brilliant day, and only one ship was lost. This was the destroyer *Berkley*—and she was not lost as a result of direct enemy attack. She had the ill fortune to be beneath a JU 88 when it jettisoned its bombs in a frantic attempt to escape a pursuing Spitfire.

The smaller raids did not cease with the inception of the bigger

raids. The former are of great value, but it is seldom that anything is said about them. This type of warfare is a sort of deadly "blind man's buff," in which successes and safety depend upon secrecy.

Among the smaller raids, carried out while Lord Louis was C.C.O. about which it is permissible to speak are that which wrecked the power plant of the great aluminium works at Glomfjord, in Norway; and that which brought back from the Channel Islands a signed order of the German commander for the forcible conveyance of Channel Islanders to Germany for slave labour.

Dawn on November 8th, 1942, may well be considered by historians as one of the major turning points of the war. It was on that day that Allied forces landed at a number of points in French North and West Africa. Lord Louis Mountbatten's Commando troops; the specially trained crews of the assault ships and landing craft; and the beach parties had most important parts in this great operation—the first really large scale invasion.

Psychology, experience in action, technical ability, power to concentrate every faculty upon the attainment of an objective, while never ignoring any factor which may prove of importance—those are the outstanding qualifications for a man who is to plan offensives against the enemy, train men to carry out that plan, and develop the necessary equipment.

"Dickie" Mountbatten had these qualifications to a markedly high degree. He is a man with both brain and imagination. He never spares himself. As C.C.O. he travelled tens of thousands of miles, making personal visits to every place where men are trained and equipment tried out; yet his work at headquarters was rather more than a full-time job.

During the Dieppe raid Lord Louis visited the men as they embarked on their hazardous expedition. One of his men—Corporal Franklin M. Koons, of the American Ranger Battalion, said afterwards: "When we got aboard our ship Lord Louis Mountbatten talked to us. He struck me as a grand guy—very full of fight." To some of the Commando troops he said: "Your task is most vital. If you don't knock out the German coast defence battery the whole operation will go wrong. You have *got* to do it, even at the greatest possible risk."

Part of "Dickie" Mountbatten's flair for dealing with people lies in his ability to find time for everyone, be he never so busy.

On one occasion a group of boys in the United States wrote, asking him to send them some notes on how to be a good Commando soldier. Lord Louis dealt with the letter personally and without delay. Here is an extract from the notes he sent to those boys, in phrases of which Lord Baden Powell might well have been proud:

"It is little use being careful for three-fourths of the way if, during the last fourth, somebody is careless and gives everything away. . . . One of the tests of leadership is ability to get the best out of everybody under you. The way to do this is to make them feel that their presence is really necessary. You will always find that some like to lead and others to follow. The latter are either shy or nervous of being a failure. Those who want to lead, you need not worry about, but the others want careful handling."

"Dickie" Mountbatten is a great-grandson of Queen Victoria and a cousin of King George VI. His father was one of the greatest Admirals of the Royal Navy—Admiral of the Fleet Prince Louis of Battenberg—who was First Sea Lord at the outbreak of war in 1914. Prince Louis resigned his office at the end of 1914 to disarm ignorant and ill-disposed criticism, which pointed to his German ancestry, regardless of the fact that he had been a naturalised British subject since 1868 and had served England faithfully and well for nearly fifty years. After his retirement Prince Louis of Battenberg assumed the surname of Mountbatten, and later became the Marquess of Milford Haven, where his fleet had so often lain at anchor.

Mountbatten's brother served in the Royal Navy from 1905 to 1933, and both his nephews—the Marquess of Milford Haven and Prince Philip of Greece, are First Lieutenants of destroyers.

In the years before the war, when "Dickie" Mountbatten had time for recreation, he played a lot of polo. It was he who put the Royal Navy "on the polo map." He captained the Royal Navy polo team which was only beaten in the final of the Inter-Regimental Tournament in 1938 by the 12th Lancers, and has written a book about the game which is regarded as a standard work. He was also a keen yachtsman, and is Vice-Admiral of the Royal Motor Yacht Club. But in his own recreations he never forgot the needs of his men for recreation, and had a great deal to do with setting up the Royal Naval Film Corporation, which provides the cinema shows in His Majesty's ships. He is a member of the Executive Committee of that corporation.

Lord Louis Mountbatten is a Knight of the Order of St. John of
M.O.A.

Jerusalem, and was appointed G.C.V.O. in 1937, having been a K.C.V.O. since 1922, and is personal naval A.D.C. to the King. In this war he has been twice mentioned in despatches, once in 1940 and once in 1941, for devotion to duty, and in 1941 he was awarded the D.S.O. "for outstanding zeal, patience and cheerfulness."

When, in the late summer of 1943, Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed Supreme Allied Commander in the Eastern theatre of war, with the acting rank of Admiral, the appointment was acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic.

SIR PERCY LOCKHART HARNAM NOBLE

K.C.B., C.V.O.

Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

A MAN of great personal charm, supremely fit both in mind and body, immaculate in his dress and in his relations with others. An officer of experience, with a brain always ready to grapple with new problems from new angles, of great tolerance and with a passion for seeing points of view other than his own. An admiral of wide knowledge and organising ability, who was in charge of the supplies and transport of the Royal Navy during the initial stages of rearmament, and who fought the Battle of the Atlantic for just on two years. That is the calibre of Sir Percy Noble, now Head of the British Admiralty Delegation in Washington.

The appointment of Head of the British Admiralty Delegation at Washington is no sinecure. Every navy has its own specialised equipment and its own methods of doing things. To be a mere liaison officer between allied navies is a difficult job, requiring resilience of mind and great tact. But the Head of the B.A.D., as it is called, is far more than a liaison officer. He has to have expert knowledge of every problem which may arise in the co-ordination of two great war efforts to the achievement of common victory. These problems range over the whole field from material and personnel to strategy and tactics. More than that, he must know and appreciate the intricacies of "Lease-Lend," whether it be the direct "Lease-Lend" from the United States to Great Britain; the more indirect "Lease-Lend" from the United States to other Allies having forces fighting at sea; or the "Lease-Lend in Reverse" from Great Britain to the United States.

To key the two greatest naval powers in the world, although they are differently built, differently equipped, differently trained and differently organised, to the job of securing victory with the greatest expedition and economy, is a Herculean task.

When Sir Percy Noble was appointed to Washington in December, 1942, to tackle that great problem, there were many who thought

it a tragedy that he had to leave his command of the Western Approaches. Yet there was nobody who could deny that he was the right man for the job. Percy Noble has the qualities of a diplomat as well as of a sailor, and here was a job, if ever there was one, which demanded both these qualities in full measure.

It is interesting to see how Percy Lockhart Harnam Noble's career has fitted him so admirably for his present post. There are several incidents in his career which, taken singly, seem of comparatively small account, but which, when reviewed in retrospect, seem to have been specially designed to fit him for this particular appointment. Take, for instance, the fact that his knowledge of the United States Navy dates back to Admiral Dewey's action at Manila in 1898.

In that year Percy Noble was a midshipman in H.M.S. *Immortalité*, where he was serving as A.D.C. to Captain Sir Edward Chichester, Bart., who commanded the ship. The *Immortalité* was sent to Manila when the United States Fleet under Admiral Dewey fought the Battle of Manila Bay, and the ship remained until the town of Manila capitulated. Captain Chichester made history in his conduct of a certain affair there—other foreign men-of-war were also present watching the fighting, and at one period the captain of a certain foreign ship went on board the *Immortalité* and asked Captain Chichester what he would do if the country he represented decided to intervene. Captain Chichester's historic reply was: "There are only two people who know the answer to that question, myself and Admiral Dewey."

When one remembers that in those days there was no wireless telegraphy or cable communication with the Government at home, the incident is a very great example of a man relying on his own judgment and acting on his own responsibility. It earned for Captain Chichester a C.M.G. and the enduring thanks and admiration of the American people.

Another instance of his earlier work giving him particularly valuable experience for his present post was part of his work as a commander. Percy Noble was a Signals specialist—not merely a Flag Lieutenant of the type which gave rise to the naval blasphemy that the letter (S) after their rank in the Navy List indicated that they were "borne for social duties"—but a practical and practising signal officer. As such, he studied the problem of co-ordinating signal procedure among the ships and squadrons of the Royal Navy,

so that possibilities of misunderstanding should be eradicated in a universal system. The result was that Commander Percy L. H. Noble, M.V.O., R.N., received the written appreciation of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty for his services in connection with the revision of the Signal Manual—the bible of the communication staffs of His Majesty's ships.

In co-ordinating the work of two navies which are working together in war there is no more important factor than communications. Unless methods, codes, and the like, are perfectly attuned in the two navies, disaster in operations is almost certain to result. Years ago it was written by another famous signal officer:

“Of what avail the loaded tube
The turret or the shell—
If flags or W/T default
The Fleet will go to Hell.”

(W/T is, of course, the abbreviation for wireless telegraphy).

War has become infinitely more complicated since those words were written, and every new complication has added to the vital importance of communications.

During his first command, as the young captain of the light cruiser *Calcutta* on the North America and West Indies station, Percy Noble showed that he possessed both diplomacy and firmness in awkward and unusual circumstances.

At the beginning of December, 1919, disturbances broke out in the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Things looked ugly, shops had been looted, and for three days the Government buildings at Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad, were besieged and attacked by mobs of negroes.

The unrest was an inevitable consequence of the war. Negro soldiers who had served in Europe in the West India Regiment had been treated as equals by the white races. They had danced with white girls. In hospital they had been tended by white nurses, and throughout their service they had experienced a far higher standard of living than that to which they had been accustomed. Demobilisation and return to the West Indies ended all that. They could no longer consort with white men and women as equals, and they had to accept a far lower standard of living to that which they had tasted in Europe. Naturally there was unrest.

In the West Indies the white population was outnumbered by the negroes by at least ten to one, so the unrest was serious. The Governor, Sir John Chancellor, saw the danger and called upon the Navy for assistance.

H.M.S. *Calcutta*, wearing the flag of Admiral Sir Alan Everett, was sent at full speed to Port of Spain in answer to the call. Admiral Everett and his flag captain—Captain P. H. Noble—were faced with a difficult situation. It bore all the characteristics of one in which the unfortunate officers on the spot would be adjudged wrong whatever they did. There have been many such incidents in history, which have ended the careers of promising officers. One at once recalls the case of General Dyer and the Amritsar riots which had occurred shortly before.

The two essentials of the situation were clear to Captain Noble and his Admiral. One was that any display of weakness would be fatal. The other was the necessity of avoiding bloodshed if at all possible. The difficulty was to combine the two. As soon as the *Calcutta* arrived at Port of Spain, Admiral Everett and Captain Noble went ashore to a conference with the Governor. The Governor asked for a naval party to be landed immediately, and at the same time said that serious rioting had broken out in the neighbouring island of Tobago, where the police had been forced to open fire.

There was no other British warship in the vicinity which could be sent to Tobago, so a detachment was landed at Port of Spain and Noble then took his ship, with her depleted company, on to Tobago.

The first activity of the naval landing party at Port of Spain was to march through the town with Percy Noble's two Scottish pipers at its head. The bagpipes appealed to the population, and the march of the fifty seamen landed from H.M.S. *Calcutta* soon became a triumphal procession of several thousands.

Afterwards there were disturbances in certain outlying districts, but wherever they threatened the sailors of the *Calcutta* appeared, and complete order was soon restored without a single broken head.

At Tobago things were not quite so easy, and Royal Marines from the *Calcutta* were forced on one occasion to use their clubs—but there was no further play with firearms or serious bloodshed.

The *Calcutta* duly picked up her landing party from Port of Spain and sailed upon her naval occasions, leaving behind her peace and

a very grateful Governor who saw to it that Captain Noble received official expression of his thanks.

Captain Noble was still in command of H.M.S. *Calcutta* when he earned the gratitude of the Government of the United States of America, whose President presented him with a gold watch and chain.

This incident also took place at Trinidad. An American steamer, the S.S. *Balabac*, anchored near H.M.S. *Calcutta*, caught fire one afternoon. Noticing the smoke rising from her, Captain Noble sent over a fire party. The fire had broken out in a coal bunker and promised to be serious, since the ship was built of wood. Moreover, the chance of extinguishing it was reduced by the fact that the engineer of the American ship had drawn fires. The *Calcutta's* small fire engine could do little, and the fire gained rapidly. Realising that the fire could not be got under control, the American engineer officer of the *Balabac* opened the sea cocks, with the idea of quenching the fire by sinking the ship. The engineer did not realise that the ship had only two or three feet of water under her, so that scuttling her would not put out the fire, but only result in the ship becoming a total loss and, incidentally, blocking an important part of the harbour; so he was prevailed upon by the officer in charge of the *Calcutta's* fire party to close the sea cocks.

Meanwhile Captain Noble himself had seen that the situation was serious, and sent ashore for a tug. This took time, and by the time the tug approached the *Balabac* was blazing fiercely fore and aft.

There was no further loss of time, however, Captain Noble, himself on the bridge of the tug and in charge of the operation, ordered the American merchantman's cable to be unshackled by his own people. Then he took the blazing ship in tow and eventually beached her well clear of the town without damage to the tug or injury to any man. It was a magnificent feat of seamanship which had saved at least some of a ship and avoided a most awkward wreck in the harbour. One of Captain Noble's officers wrote afterwards: "I think most of us rather enjoyed the whole episode. Doing things with Captain Noble was always great fun."

Sir Percy Noble has had the distinction of serving—as a lieutenant—in the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert* twice, once in the reign of King Edward VII. and once in the reign of King George V. All his time as a Commander, the whole of the last war, was spent as

Executive Officer and Second in Command of a large cruiser. He has had considerable experience of Boys' Training, for he was for two years in command of the great naval training establishment at Shotley, and afterwards started the naval training establishment known as H.M.S. *St. Vincent* at Gosport and commanded it for a year.

At the Admiralty he has served as Director of the Operations Division of the Naval Staff, and he has flown his flag afloat for two years in command of the Second Cruiser Squadron.

February of that troubled year, 1935, found Percy Noble, by then a fairly senior Rear-Admiral, at the Admiralty as Fourth Sea Lord and Chief of Supplies and Transport. As such he became one of the "Lords Commissioners for Executing the Office of Lord High Admiral."

Noble had had previous dealings with the problems of supply, for he had been Director of Naval Equipment at the Admiralty for over a year—from September, 1931, to December, 1932.

It is very doubtful whether, in time of peace, any man has ever held the appointment of Fourth Sea Lord during a more difficult period. The requirements of the Royal Navy, in supplies as well as in ships and men, had for years been neglected while our rulers disported themselves in a fool's paradise of "Disarmament" and "Collective Security."

In 1935 came the great awakening. Japan had washed her hands of naval limitation. Italy invaded Abyssinia in defiance of the League of Nations. Germany decided to build a navy far beyond that permitted to her by the Treaty of Versailles. The League of Nations, led by a British Government which had nailed its colours to "Collective Security," imposed "sanctions" on Italy. It soon became evident that the great international body at Geneva had only one idea of "Collective Security"—that the nation which it dubbed a wrong-doer should be brought to heel by the British Navy.

Thus, with war an imminent probability, there came uncomfortable realisation of the results of years of parsimony. The Fleet in the Mediterranean was short of stores. It had no reserves of ammunition. Every one of the thousands of needs of a fighting fleet was, to say the least of it, in "short supply." And even such supplies as were available could not be taken to the danger spot without delay for lack of immediately available transport.



Admiral Sir Percy L. H. Noble

The Navy was not to blame for this state of affairs. The Navy is a fighting Service, and as such, an instrument of policy. If any one should doubt that the Navy was the servant of the political Government of the day, and that its strength and supply were dictated by politicians, let him recall the words of Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister of England. After the great awakening, when Mr. Baldwin had won a General Election, the Government issued a White Paper setting out the need for immediate rearmament. When Mr. Baldwin was accused of having delayed British rearmament to a dangerous degree—beyond “the edge of risk” as the current political phrase had it—he said quite frankly that he could think of nothing “which would have made the loss of the Election from my point of view more certain than earlier rearmament.”

The difficulties of a Chief of the Supplies and Transport of the Royal Navy under such conditions were stupendous. The whole country was tuned to peace. Not only were supplies short, but there was hardly any production of the vast number of items so suddenly needed. The Navy, or a great part of it, was suddenly put practically on to a war footing, while production remained virtually on the old “disarmament” level, and transport was still keyed to peaceful trading.

Naval transport in itself presented the Fourth Sea Lord with problems which would have staggered a strategist. War might break out at any moment. If it did, could Italy close the Mediterranean to our shipping by reason of Mussolini’s much vaunted “quadrilateral of fire” straddling the central narrows between Sicily and Libya? If the Mediterranean should be closed, supplies would have to go round the Cape of Good Hope. That would, of course, mean that far more ships would be needed for a given rate of delivery of supplies—and Italy held Somaliland and Eritrea, close on the flank of this route.

The Fourth Sea Lord had nothing to do with the building of ships or the manning of ships, but without the work of the Fourth Sea Lord the ships and men would be immobilised. From February, 1935, to September, 1937, Percy Noble worked as Fourth Sea Lord and Chief of Supplies and Transport, and there is no doubt that the ability of the Royal Navy to meet the shock of war in 1939 was as much his accomplishment as that of any other man.

And in the midst of these enormous tasks, Percy Noble achieved

something for which naval officers had been working for years. It had long been a bone of contention between the three Fighting Services that, whereas the Army Officer and the Air Force Officer was entitled to a marriage allowance, the Naval Officer was not paid any such allowance; and this despite the fact that the frequent moves of a Naval officer either made it impossible for him to see his family for years on end, or added considerably to his financial liabilities. The system was unfair and there was much discontent. Reform had been canvassed in the Navy and on the floor of the House of Commons, but every suggestion made had been scouted by the Treasury. Percy Noble, despite the hundreds of other calls on his time, with the able assistance of his secretary, Paymaster Captain W. McBride, worked out a scheme which met every objection which the Treasury had put forward to previous suggestions, and fought it through. Naval officers were granted marriage allowance, and a great and long-standing grievance was removed.

Percy Noble relinquished his seat on the Board of Admiralty in September, 1937. He was by that time a Vice-Admiral and a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath. After such a long and arduous spell of duty at the Admiralty he richly deserved some leave and another high appointment. He got the latter, but little enough of the former. December, 1937, found him appointed Commander-in-Chief of the China Station.

There was a time when the post of Commander-in-Chief, China Station, was much sought after as providing a life of comparative leisure and excellent opportunities for sport. This was certainly not the case when Sir Percy Noble hoisted his flag as Commander-in-Chief. The Sino-Japanese War had been raging for a considerable time. The Japanese were becoming increasingly aggressive. International incidents followed close upon one another. Sir Percy Noble, faced with truculent Japanese who were well aware that they were in overwhelming force, had to keep an eye on events at the other side of the world, where the situation in Europe was rapidly deteriorating. Britain could not at that moment afford to be drawn into war in the Far East. The Commander-in-Chief had to use diplomacy to the limit to keep the Far Eastern situation on an even keel, while endeavouring not to "lose face" with the Chinese or Japanese, or to suffer any fall of British prestige in Indo-China, Siam, or the Dutch East Indies. He had also to do what he could

to provide for the defence of Malaya and Australia, should the worst happen and Japan suddenly declare war.

In those difficult times Sir Percy Noble worked in the closest possible touch with the United States Navy in the Western Pacific, and here again we see how one appointment after another seems to have led him towards his present post at Washington.

Sir Percy Noble's responsibility in the Far East was the greater because he was not merely the naval Commander-in-Chief. On the China Station the naval Commander-in-Chief was also the representative of the British Government—and thus had a dual role which did not obtain in the case of any other naval Commander-in-Chief.

Things might well have seemed hopeless to Sir Percy Noble, as he watched the situation deteriorating on both sides of the world. If they did, he gave no sign of it. It needed immense strength of character—and physical strength too—to carry on, particularly after war broke out in Europe and so many units of his already weak forces were taken from him to serve in other theatres of war. But Percy Noble never wavered, and although he must have felt that term of duty in the Far East, he continued to look amazingly young and astonishingly fit and smart.

Then he came home, and was given the biggest job of the war. He was appointed to fight the main battle—the battle upon which the whole of the Allied cause depended—the Battle of the Atlantic. As the commander in this most vital struggle, his title was Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches.

He was appointed when things were going badly. The creation of a Western Approaches Command separate to the command of one of the naval ports was a measure of the seriousness with which that struggle was regarded by those who had the facts at their disposal.

In the early part of the war the Western Approaches came under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth. This was then geographically and strategically sound. The majority of convoys, whether bound to or from the East Coast and the Channel ports, or to or from the Bristol Channel, passed south of Ireland. Even ships bound for Liverpool or the Clyde used the Irish Sea and the "Western Approaches" south of Ireland. By comparison with the last war the problem of guarding trade in these approaches to Great Britain was complicated by our inability to use the ports of Southern Ireland, but the centre of gravity of the trade coming

from the open oceans to British coastal waters still lay in the southwest.

This was so until the summer of 1940, when there was a complete change in the strategic situation. Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, were all occupied by the Germans. The Germans thus controlled the European coast from the North Cape to St. Jean de Luz, with its great and small harbours stretching in an arc for more than 2000 miles around two sides of Great Britain. Nor was the German advantage purely one of geography. With these bases in their possession the U-boats and the surface raiders could claim practically free access to the great ocean trade routes. No longer did they have to hazard the passage of the North Sea or the Straits of Dover in order to reach the open sea in which they preyed upon the vital supplies of Britain.

Nor was this all. The German advantage at this time was augmented by the serious losses which Britain had been forced to incur, particularly in destroyers, in order to save the remnant of the armies from Dunkirk, St. Valerie, St. Nazaire, and other embarkation ports along the European coast.

The British Empire had had 185 destroyers at the outbreak of war. By July, 1940, twenty-two British destroyers had been lost, as well as a large number of armed trawlers and other escort and patrol craft. In addition to this, after the gruelling task of evacuating our armies from the continent, no less than sixty-two destroyers had to be placed in dockyard hands for repairs.

A simple calculation shows that we therefore had only 101 effective destroyers to safeguard our vital maritime trade and operate with the main fleet—and this at a time when the German strategic position had suddenly improved beyond all calculations. Moreover, the sudden entry of Italy into the war, and the defection of practically the whole of the French Fleet, had at the same time seriously increased our naval commitments in a new theatre of war.

The United States came to the rescue with fifty destroyers in exchange for the right to build American naval and air bases in British Empire territories, and a few American coastguard cutters were also made over. These ships were invaluable, but they were old vessels built during the last war and laid up for many years. Although in a good state of preservation, they were not fitted with modern U-boat hunting appliances and had to be altered and refitted before they could be considered really effective.

Here, then, was the "set up" of the Battle of the Atlantic in the latter half of 1940. The prospect was dark in the extreme, and made no lighter by the fact that practically the whole production of this country, inevitably reduced by continued air attack, had had to be devoted to re-equipping the Army to repel the expected invasion of these islands.

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. A. V. Alexander, has stated that, if the possibility of supplying Great Britain under the conditions obtaining in the latter half of 1940 had been posed to any staff college in the world, the answer would have been that the problem was completely insoluble. Yet it was solved. Britain not only stood out as the lone bastion of civilisation during those dark months, she built up her strength. It was a victory of supply, won on the ocean trade routes, the sea approaches, and in the ports.

Naturally it took some little time for the enemy to exploit to the full the strategic advantages he had gained, and to deploy his whole strength against our shipping. It seems probable that this time was extended by the German concentration upon the air assault of Britain and preparations for invasion. The German High Command seems to have been so convinced that Britain could not stand up alone against direct assault that it delayed putting its full effort into attack upon the sea supply routes without which Britain could not live. Had it not been for this the history of the world might well have been very different.

Although sinkings at sea and losses in harbour rose dangerously, it was 1941 before Germany was putting her full effort into the war at sea. By that time the Western Approaches Command was in process of being reorganised to meet the changed conditions and the immensely increased threat.

Up to that time the headquarters of the Battle of the Atlantic had been outside Plymouth, and one flag officer combined the duties of Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, and Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches. Then it was decided to separate the two commands, with the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, at Liverpool. Ships and convoys had to be routed north of Ireland, and the centre of gravity of the "Western Approaches" was thereby changed from Plymouth to the Mersey area. Moreover, it was clear that one man could not look after the Western Approaches as well as the great dockyard port of Devonport under "blitz" conditions.

The task of transferring the Western Approaches Command Headquarters to Liverpool was immense. It was more than the transfer of a headquarters. It entailed setting up a new command in the middle of one of the fiercest and most vital battles in history. And it had to be done instantaneously. Any interim period with no effective control over the thousands of ships at sea would have meant disaster.

While waiting and organising the new headquarters, Admiral Noble took the opportunity of going to sea himself in an escort destroyer, taking one convoy out and bringing another one home—an experience that was to prove of great value to him later.

Much building had to be done in Liverpool. It would have been worse than useless to house a vital headquarters in a town subjected to heavy air attack without making that headquarters and its communications as bomb-proof as possible. The work had to be done under frequent and heavy air bombardment. This caused delays, and when Admiral Sir Percy Noble and his staff moved in to the Liverpool headquarters in February, 1941, the workmen were still busy.

The manner of the change-over of the headquarters is interesting. Duplicate staffs were created, and the Liverpool headquarters were put into effective operation while the Plymouth headquarters continued to operate and exercise control. For a week the two headquarters operated together "in parallel." Only when the Liverpool headquarters had proved efficient and had got over its inevitable "teething troubles" was the control switched over instantaneously from Plymouth to Liverpool.

The headquarters of the Western Approaches Command at Liverpool is one of the most important centres in Britain.

On one wall, extending two floors in height and about twice as much in width, is the "plot." This plot shows at a glance the position of every convoy, every escort group, every rescue tug, every air patrol, every U-boat report, and every detached unit of the Royal Navy. The positions of the naval units shown on the plot are moved every four hours, and the four-hourly weather predictions in every area are appended. The plot is, in fact, an ever-moving record of the progress of the Battle of the Atlantic.

Opposite that ever-moving plot, which is tended night and day, and upon which any unusual occurrence appears immediately,

without waiting for the routine moves, there are four rooms, each one of them glass-fronted and looking out on the "plot."

Admiral Sir Percy Noble had one of these rooms. Alongside his room, and inter-communicating so as to ensure the quickest and most perfect co-operation, is the room of the Air Officer Commanding the Coastal Command Wing of the Royal Air Force working with the naval authorities in the "Western Approaches."

Below the rooms of the two chiefs are two other rooms. Again they are inter-communicating, and they look out direct upon the "plot." These rooms are those of the "Duty Commanders" on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, and his Royal Air Force opposite number—the "Duty Controller" of the Coastal Command Wing operating in the Western Approaches.

In that room looking out upon the "plot" Admiral Sir Percy Noble spent most of his days and much of his nights from February, 1941, to December, 1942. Above this office were his sleeping quarters, so that he was always at a few moment's call, and could be shown any important signal at any hour of the twenty-four.

It was an absorbing but a strenuous life. The Commander-in-Chief was hardly ever able to consider himself "off duty." In fact in the twenty-two months that he was in command at Liverpool Sir Percy Noble was able on one occasion to snatch four days' leave. That was all the leave he had in the whole period.

He was not tied to his office all the time—he could not be, for there was a multitude of other duties. He had set up a new naval command, and one dealing with merchant ship movements, in the greatest mercantile shipping port in the world. The shipping interests were keen to co-operate, but prone to regard naval control in the light of unjustifiable interference in their business by amateurs. That was a feeling which had to be broken down. The shipping interests had to be given faith in the organisation for the protection of trade, and insight into the problems with which the naval authorities were faced. Sir Percy Noble accomplished these difficult tasks with conspicuous success. Frankness—a complete disarming frankness—as practised by Percy Noble, carried the day. Suspicion went by the board, and a fuller co-operation and mutual trust reigned in its stead.

Sir Percy Noble had also to deal with the docks, and all the hundred and one factors which go to speed up or slow down the turn round of a ship. He had to have long and involved conferences

with the Mersey Docks & Harbour Board. Here, again, a hundred per cent co-operation was vital. It was achieved. There was also the good-will of the people of Liverpool to be won. It was won.

In all these relations with civil authorities Admiral Sir Percy Noble was very greatly assisted by two great figures in Liverpool—Lord Derby and the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Sir Sydney Jones, without them his difficulties might have proved far greater.

There are many things that were not as they should have been when Sir Percy Noble took over the Western Approaches Command. For instance, cargoes which had been brought across the oceans at great risk were unloaded and stocked in warehouses provided with elderly watchmen, but no fire-fighting squads—and this when Merseyside was a frequent target for the Luftwaffe. Sir Percy Noble saw this, and he organised fire squads of sailors and soldiers to ensure that goods brought to this country at the risk of men's lives should not be burnt for lack of adequate precautions after they had been safely landed.

With a command involving so many diverse activities—it also entailed weekly conferences at the Admiralty and visits to ports from the Bristol Channel to Stornoway and Oban—it would not have been surprising if the Commander-in-Chief became somewhat withdrawn from those he commanded. But with Sir Percy Noble this was not so. His creed was approachability, and his intense interest in people and their points of view brought him into frequent personal contact with the men who, in one way or another, were fighting the Battle of the Atlantic.

He personally attended many of the convoy conferences, where the order of sailing and many other matters were discussed by the masters of the ships which were to form the convoy, the commodore of the convoy, and the commanding officers of the escort ships. When a convoy arrived Sir Percy Noble used personally to see the commanding officers of the escort groups, if anything had happened during the voyage, and hear the story at first hand, taking full note of criticisms or suggestions made. When a warship or merchant ship arrived from some particularly gallant or hazardous voyage the Commander-in-Chief went down to the docks in person to welcome the ship's companies.

Sir Percy Noble also used actively to encourage merchant ship captains to visit the headquarters of the command, and see the whole "works" in operation. It was a revelation to most of them,

who had not fully realised how their progress at sea was anxiously watched all the time, or the extent of the measures taken for their safety. Those in a merchant ship in mid-Atlantic, sailing alone or separated from a convoy by breakdown or bad weather are prone to feel forsaken and forlorn. A visit to the Western Approaches Command Headquarters showed the merchant ship captains how they were looked after throughout their voyages, and gave them greater confidence in the future.

One of Sir Percy Noble's problems at Liverpool was the difficulty of getting any exercise. This worried him, for he had always been fit and an athlete—he had played stand-off half to Wing-Commander Sir Louis Greig, and was a member of the famous Royal Navy Rugby football team of 1907, and had been a notable squash and rackets player, and President of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Rackets Association. The Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, had no time to play games, hunt, or to shoot—a sport he loves, and Liverpool did not provide a variety of good walks near at hand. The problem was solved by the institution of two standard walks, one of them in Sefton Park. In order to get the maximum amount of exercise in the minimum amount of time, Sir Percy Noble was taken in his car to the starting place. He used to walk hard, usually with his Chief of Staff, for half an hour, then be picked up by his car and rushed back to work.

Sir Percy Noble had a personal as well as a professional interest in the Battle of the Atlantic. His elder son was commanding an escort destroyer, and he has been decorated for the zeal and efficiency which he has shown in guarding the great convoys, and has had his ship sunk under him, while his youngest son was serving in a cruiser in the Western Approaches Command, and whose service has similarly been decorated with a D.S.C.

One outstanding fact about Sir Percy Noble is that there is no officer or man who has served with him who does not look up to him, not only with respect and admiration, but with a very genuine and deep affection.

ALBERT LAWRENCE POLAND

C.B., D.S.O., D.S.C.

Captain, Royal Navy

AL. POLAND is a small-ship officer who has seen more of this war than most. He collected a D.S.C. in the last war for torpedoing the Western Pier and laying the inshore smoke screen during the Ostend blocking operations when he was serving in coastal motor boats. He was also present at the blocking of Zeebrugge, in a coastal motor boat, having been at the Battles of Heligoland Bight, Dogger Bank and Jutland in the battle-cruiser *New Zealand*. In this war he has been mentioned in despatches, awarded the D.S.O. and bar, and made a Companion of the Order of the Bath.

Immediately on the outbreak of this war Poland went to Scots-toun, where he "stood by" the new anti-aircraft sloop *Black Swan*, which was building at the yard of Messrs. Yarrow Limited.

Poland commissioned the *Black Swan* in January, 1940, and for ten months he was the senior officer afloat in the Rosyth Escort Force which used to take the convoys up and down the East Coast route.

Early in April, 1940, however, the *Black Swan*, with her sister-ships *Auckland*, *Flamingo* and *Bittern*, was detached for service in Norway. Poland was the senior officer of this flotilla of four sloops.

At Rosyth the four sloops hastily embarked about 600 Royal Marines and 100 naval ratings. They also embarked vast quantities of equipment and blankets, two 4-inch guns and their mountings, four 3.7-inch howitzers and eight 2-pounder pom-poms, together with all the ammunition for these guns. Other items of their cargoes were a complete searchlight and generator and 500 rifles and a million rounds of rifle ammunition for the Norwegian patriots. By the time they were loaded all the ships had about 170 passengers on board and were drawing about a foot more than normal. Moreover, it was blowing a full gale and the heavily laden ships, with their weighty deck cargoes were working so badly that the first ship

to get away—the *Auckland*—found it impossible to round Rattray Head. Finally the force put into Invergordon for shelter.

They sailed again next morning. Their mission was to establish a battery at Aalesund which would command the channel inshore of the off-lying islands of Norway, which was being used by the Germans for running iron-ore ships from Narvik through the blockade. On the way across the North Sea Poland was ordered to go first to Aandalsnes, to occupy the railhead there before going on to Aalesund.

The matter was one of extreme urgency, and the force was delayed by the weather, so Poland decided to take a rather tricky short cut through the islands during an interval between snowstorms. It was a bold decision, for none of the ships had been able to fix their positions since leaving Scotland, however, thanks to Lieutenant Tennyson, Poland's navigating officer, they steamed "into the right hole." Tennyson got "full marks" from Poland.

Just as the ships were entering the fiord, aircraft reported five large German destroyers steaming as if to intercept the sloops. When the masts and funnels of ships appeared over the horizon Poland "thought we were for it, but was much relieved when the ships were identified as three of our cruisers."

The sloops arrived at Aandalsnes just before dark. Everything seemed very peaceful and a British destroyer was there. The jetty was only long enough for one ship, but all four sloops were unloaded during the night. Next morning the *Auckland* and *Bittern*, which carried the 4-inch guns for the projected Aalesund battery, sailed. The *Black Swan* and *Flamingo* stayed at Aandalsnes and prepared for the arrival of further troops.

They were not left in peace. In Poland's words: "Jerry had spotted the party and the fun soon began. Bad identification led us to allow a plane to circle unmolested overhead, as locals told us it was a Norwegian. He soon called up his pals and the bombing started the same day. High-level stuff at first, but not very accurate and the sloop's gunfire kept them up and away. The local inhabitants complained that we broke their windows with our gunfire! Soon afterwards the dive-bombers appeared."

Cruisers and destroyers brought more troops and equipment by night, but they did not stay. An anti-aircraft cruiser arrived but did not stay long as it seemed certain, with insufficient sea-room to manœuvre, that she would be hit sooner or later. The *Flamingo*

was slightly damaged by near misses, but the *Black Swan* remained, and formed the only real anti-aircraft defence for the town and the troops ashore.

The bombing became steadily worse, and before long most of the town was set on fire. As Poland said: "We spent from 9 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. as a rule chasing our tail round and round and up and down the fiord, avoiding bombs and trying to keep the attacks off our troops at the same time."

After two days of this, it was clear that ammunition was being expended so quickly that there was danger of running short. The *Black Swan*, however, hung on until she was relieved after nearly five days in the fiords, and went back to Scapa Flow to replenish with ammunition.

No sooner was this done than the *Black Swan* had to go back to Aandalsnes in a hurry. She arrived just before sunset to find the *Flamingo* with practically no ammunition left. The latter had even fired practice shell and target smoke shell in beating off the last attack. The *Flamingo* sailed within half an hour of the *Black Swan's* arrival.

The bombing was now much more intense. On his first day Poland fired over 1000 rounds. Fortunately about 400 rounds had arrived by sea, and this was embarked during the night. Even so, the *Black Swan* used all but twenty rounds during the next day.

It was obvious that the object of the Stukas was to sink or drive off the sloop so that they could attack the town virtually unmolested. It was essential that the ship should be kept in action to thwart this intention. During the second day, however, the situation on board the *Black Swan* deteriorated. Not only was ammunition running perilously low, but the gun recuperators were getting tired so that the guns were sluggish in running out after the recoil. Moreover, the ship's wireless aerials had been shot away, and the guns' crews were showing signs of exhaustion. About noon Poland was forced to withdraw some little distance down the fiord to effect repairs and refill the recuperators of the guns, which had become worn and very hot.

In point of fact the *Black Swan* was ordered, early that afternoon, to "withdraw," but this was not so easy, as the ship was thirty miles from the open sea and each time Poland headed for the sea a fresh lot of Huns arrived and the ship had to start circling and twisting again to avoid the bombs.

In those two days the *Black Swan* certainly shot down eight enemy aircraft and probably accounted for half a dozen others. All the time Aandsnes and the nearby town of Molde were being heavily bombed. When the ammunition remaining had just been reported to Poland as "eighty rounds of H.A. left, sir," a formation of twelve JU 88's were seen approaching. Sorry as they were for Molde and those ashore, Poland and his men were relieved to see the bombers pass over to attack Molde instead of the ship.

Communications were extremely difficult, and made no easier by the fact that the *Black Swan's* wireless aerials were shot away more than once—on one occasion Poland did it himself when tackling a JU 87 with a pair of Lewis guns. Once a very important message reached Poland by a very original method. A Fleet Air Arm Gladiator appeared and tried to flash a message, but the aircraft had to turn so fast in the narrow fiord that it was impossible to read the signal. The Gladiator's observer then scribbled the message on a piece of cardboard and tied it to a bit of bunting with a weight attached. The pilot then came down almost to sea level and the message was dropped with great skill into the *Black Swan's* motor dinghy, which was lying off the town. Poland still has the original of that message.

At about four o'clock on the afternoon of the second day, when the *Black Swan*, with frequent interruption through bombing attacks, was making for the open sea, an attack by several Stukas developed. One JU 87 dived down on the starboard bow and those on the bridge of the *Black Swan* saw the bomb—about 350 pounds—coming straight for the ship. Both Poland and his navigator said, "That's got us." The navigator was manœuvring the ship and Poland was giving the Hun some Lewis gun fire in his belly as he pulled out of his dive. For a moment nothing happened. There was no noise or smoke. Then suddenly the tail of the ship "picked itself up, shook itself like a bobtailed sheep dog coming out of water, and settled down again." The *Black Swan* continued to steam at full speed and those on the bridge remarked: "Must have been a near miss after all." They'd had plenty!

A few minutes later the gunner arrived on the bridge and said to Poland: "Do you know No. 3 magazine is full of water?" The reply—"No, why?" seemed to surprise him, and he answered: "Don't you know? We've been hit!"

The bomb had landed at an angle on the starboard side of the quarter-deck, gone through the deck and through the wardroom (through the wardroom table, incidentally), through a fresh-water tank and the magazine, and had passed out through the bottom of the ship between the propellor shafts, making a jagged hole about 3 feet 6 inches by 4 feet just clear of the keel plate. It must have burst in the water some distance below the ship. That happened in the last attack to which the *Black Swan* was subjected!

The *Black Swan* gained the open sea, and Poland stood to the westward until he considered that the air raids should have finished for the day. Meanwhile, much work was done in shoring up the bulkheads and decks in the vicinity of the bomb damage. Poland then decided to return to Aandalsnes although his ship was damaged and he had very little ammunition left. He knew, however, that his ship provided the only reliable means of communication between the headquarters and forces ashore and the Commander-in-Chief, and he felt that he could not leave those on shore without giving them the opportunity of making any signal they considered necessary. As it happened, the shore headquarters did have a most important signal to send—nothing less than the plans for evacuation.

The *Black Swan* arrived off Aandalsnes about 9 p.m., and Poland was then faced with the problem of what would happen when he eased the speed of the ship. At full speed the suction below the hole in her bottom had kept the water below the level of the wardroom deck, but a reduction in speed would mean a reduction in that suction. He eased the speed of the *Black Swan* very gradually. At "slow speed" the water was up to the wardroom deck level, so he tried stopping. The water rose to about two inches above the wardroom deck level—but no higher. All was well.

The town had had a bad time that day, and what was left of it was burning fiercely. As soon as the *Black Swan* had been forced to withdraw down the fiord the Stukas had been able to come in low and the few single-barrelled pom-poms which the Royal Marines had ashore had been unable to stop them. Our troops had had a bad time.

Poland at once sent an officer ashore to get any news or signals, making it clear that he wanted to get away again by midnight so that the ship would be well to seaward by daylight as she had only about twenty rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition left.

Owing to difficulties ashore due to the results of the enemy bombing the officer did not get back to the ship by midnight, and, in spite of many impatient messages from Poland, the ship did not sail until after 3 a.m., and was consequently unable to clear the coast by daylight. Fortunately, however, she was not molested by enemy aircraft and made a good passage to Scapa Flow, despite bad weather and the hole in her bottom.

Soon after leaving the fiord the *Black Swan* passed the sloop *Fleetwood*, which had been detailed to take her place. "We did not envy her," wrote Poland afterwards.

From Scapa Flow the *Black Swan* went to Falmouth, her officers still able to stand in the wardroom and see the sea below the ship. At Falmouth she was repaired and Poland and his men got a few days of well-earned leave.

During her two visits to Norway the only casualties in the *Black Swan* had been one broken ankle and a slight cut sustained by a man in the after magazine when the bomb passed through it and burst under the ship, and one man of the pom-pom's crew with a small bomb splinter in his arm—an amazingly small casualty list considering the bombing attacks which had been aimed at her and the fact that the ship was riddled with small splinter holes like the top of a pepper-pot. Her sister-ship, the *Bittern*, was sunk by our forces at Namsos after having been bombed and set on fire. The other two ships of the original force—the *Auckland* and *Flamingo*—both did magnificent work in Norway and later off the Libyan coast.

In November, 1940, Poland sailed, via the Cape and Bombay, to Alexandria, where he was to take command of the cruiser *Liverpool*, which had had her bows blown off by a torpedo and was waiting, having false bows built on to her at Alexandria, to be steamed across the Pacific for final repair in the United States. The *Liverpool* made the journey successfully at amazingly high speed and was back in service in a few months. Poland, however, did not go with her. He arrived at Alexandria on January 15th, 1941, and on February 5th he was appointed Senior Naval Officer of the Inshore Squadron operating off the Libyan coast, and for thirteen months had his headquarters on shore at Tobruk or Mersa Matruh.

Volumes could—and should—be written about the work of the Inshore Squadron. A more curious collection of ships it would be

difficult to find. There were modern ships and museum pieces. They ranged from a 15-inch gun monitor which had been built to bombard the Belgian coast in the last war, to shallow-draught river gunboats which had seen many years of service on the Danube and the Yangtze. There were modern sloops and old trawlers from England and tough whalers from South Africa, in addition to modern tank landing craft. There were even those notorious auxiliary schooners *Tiberio* and *Maria Giovanni*, which the Navy had captured from the Italians.

With this curious force Poland did wonders all along the Egyptian and Libyan coasts. When the army advanced, its forward troops far outstripped any overland supply lines which could be organised, so the task of supplying them fell upon the Inshore Squadron of the Mediterranean Fleet, and the merchant ships they escorted. Hundreds of thousands of tons of petrol, water, rations, ammunition, and all manner of other things were taken up the coast by the little ships and landed either on open beaches or at the little ports from which the enemy were driven. The beach work was arduous and difficult, but often it was preferable to using a port which the enemy had made unpleasant with mines and all manner of booby traps.

On their return trips the ships of this coastal ferry took back thousands of prisoners to the cages at the base, for the advancing army did not know what to do with the very large numbers of prisoners which fell into their hands. Without the work of the little ships along the coast the Army could never have performed the feats which it did. The motto of the Inshore Squadron might have been the words used by the Commander-in-Chief in referring to its work—"unbreakable determination to allow no obstacle to stand in the way of meeting all requirements."

Nor was the work of Poland's squadron confined to supplying the forward troops and, during the long siege of Tobruk, of succouring that fortress. There were many offensive tasks. The monitor *Terror* bombarded enemy positions until her guns became so hot and worn that the "ton-weight projectiles somersaulted about the enemy encampments like skittles in a bowling alley." Further inshore, the gunboats did their share of bombarding, and in so doing behaved with an impertinence which was positively Elizabethan. More than once they entered harbours held by the enemy, and, attacking his defences from behind, caused much



Captain A. L. Poland

damage and such confusion as only startled and badly scared Italians can achieve.

The supplies to Tobruk during the siege were very largely maintained by a destroyer ferry service whose story is an epic in itself. They also brought away large numbers of sick and wounded, and at one period carried out the relief of the garrison by some 15,000 troops.

There was laughter in the Inshore Squadron, but there was much sadness. The enemy did his utmost to stop its traffic and activities. There was mining to contend with, and attacks by the hundred by bombers, dive-bombers and torpedo-bombers. For a ship to do a trip up the coast without being several times attacked was almost unheard of. Nor did the ships always have fighter protection worthy of the name. In those days the strength of the Royal Air Force in the western desert had mainly to be used to support the troops. Naturally, under these conditions, there were losses and often these were heavy and grievous. It was of the Inshore Squadron and the supply ships that Sir Andrew Cunningham was thinking when he remarked, on hearing that he had been made a G.C.B., "I would rather they had given me three squadrons of Hurricanes." But the work of the Inshore Squadron went on.

Poland left the Inshore Squadron on March 10th, 1942, and on March 18th he took command of the Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla, with the *Jervis* as flotilla leader. The flotilla was part of the Mediterranean Fleet.

On March 20th the Fourteenth Destroyer Flotilla sailed from Alexandria in company with Rear-Admiral Vian's cruisers *Cleopatra*, *Dido* and *Euryalus* and the Twenty-second Destroyer Flotilla. Their task was to fight an important convoy through to Malta.

At that time our troops were holding a line running inland from Gazala, about forty miles west of Tobruk, and so fighter protection could be given until the convoy and its escorts and covering forces were some way west of this point. Late on March 21st there were some air attacks, and a torpedo bomber attack at dusk, but all were ineffective.

During that night information was received that Italian surface forces had put to sea.

By the forenoon of March 22nd it was blowing hard from the south-east and the ships were experiencing a fairly heavy following sea. That morning the covering force was joined by the *Penelope*

and *Legion* from Malta. There were more ineffective air attacks during the forenoon.

Further information was received of the Italian movements, and by noon it was clear that the enemy squadron, whose composition was not known, was steering to intercept the convoy. Early in the afternoon the *Legion*, which was on the northerly destroyer screen, reported an enemy cruiser in sight.

Rear-Admiral Vian at once turned the convoy away to the southward with its close escorts, and concentrated his cruisers and destroyers by units and steamed towards the enemy, laying smoke between the convoy and the enemy.

Let Poland take up the tale of his recollections and impressions of what was to become known as the Battle of Sirte.

"From this time onwards the main impression I have is of quantities of smoke—everywhere—which blocked all view of what was going on. The particular duty of my flotilla was to maintain the smoke screen between the enemy and the convoy. This we did by steaming up and down a few miles north of the convoy. Our smoke was being carried to the north-west by the wind, and, with that of the other flotilla and the cruisers, formed an impenetrable pall which blotted out everything to the north and west of us.

"Meanwhile we could hear our cruisers, which had formed into two units, *Euryalus* with *Cleopatra* and *Penelope* with *Dido*, firing at the unseen enemy. They themselves could only see the enemy from time to time in the smoke. Occasionally our cruisers emerged from the smoke for a few minutes and then disappeared into it again.

"Every now and then a salvo or a few rounds would fall near the flotilla and we had no knowledge of from whom or from what direction they came. Meanwhile the enemy air force had not been idle and many heavy air attacks developed, the majority on the convoy and principally by JU 88's. However, the *Carlisle* and her "Hunts" put up a magnificent barrage and the convoy was unharmed. These attacks continued throughout the day.

"At about three o'clock Rear-Admiral Vian made a signal, "Enemy has been beaten off." The cruisers reformed into one squadron and they and the destroyers steamed in three parallel columns between the convoy and the most likely direction of attack by the enemy.

"About an hour later the *Euryalus* reported, 'Enemy in sight' ;

having sighted enemy ships to the north-westward. Similar tactics to those of the earlier action were repeated. Once again we had very little definite idea of what was happening behind, or in, the smoke. We could see the convoy being heavily attacked time and time again by large formations of JU 88's. It seemed inevitable that before long the ships would be damaged or even destroyed, but after each rain of bombs, whose splashes often hid the ships completely from our sight, they emerged steaming steadily on towards their destination. There is no doubt they owed their escape to the terrific and accurate fire of their escort which kept attacking planes up high and put them off their aim when they attempted to attack.

"Meanwhile our cruisers were engaging the enemy to the north-west and the action gradually moved in a westerly direction from the convoy. The enemy appeared to be trying to work round to the west and south so as to get between the convoy and its destination—Malta.

"The Admiral made a general signal to 'attack with torpedoes through smoke if opportunity offers,' but from our position the enemy was entirely hidden and once again all we knew of him was occasional 'overs' from the salvoes fired at the cruisers and the other flotilla falling near us.

"Again our ships kept on appearing and disappearing in the smoke. On one occasion the *Cleopatra* appeared for a moment and started a signal from the Admiral by light to us. 'Feint at ——' was all we received before she disappeared into the fog of smoke again.

"Soon afterwards the Twenty-second Destroyer Flotilla appeared, steaming at full speed and still making smoke. From the leader I obtained an estimated position of the enemy, who were heavily engaging the Twenty-second Flotilla, which seemed at that time the only ships directly between the convoy and the enemy. The *Havock* of this flotilla had been hit and had limped off to join the convoy escort.

"The moment seemed propitious for a torpedo attack on the enemy through the smoke made by the Twenty-second Destroyer Flotilla. Accordingly I led round so as to pass astern of the Twenty-second Flotilla and through their smoke where it was not too thick.

"When we emerged from the smoke we could see only one enemy

ship which, instead of being four miles north-north-west of us, was well over six miles away and bearing about west-north-west. The ship in sight also looked rather larger than the Italian 6-inch cruiser we had expected to see. However, the flotilla was ordered to take up formation for a torpedo attack and speed was increased to the maximum. Unfortunately some Italian torpedo bombers chose this moment to make an attack on us and we had to turn to comb the tracks of their torpedoes. This delayed us and had an adverse effect on our position relative to the enemy.

"It was very soon after passing through the smoke that a second enemy ship appeared out of the haze, also looking remarkably large, and after an interval a third appeared and later a fourth. They also appeared to be an uncomfortably long way off and I remember inquiring more than once what the range of the nearest one was. The range incidentally seemed to close astonishingly slowly. The four enemy ships, the big one on the left, then a slightly smaller one, and then two which seemed to be a reasonable size for cruisers, appeared to be steaming about south-south-west in line ahead but with very big intervals between them. From the *Jervis* the intervals seemed to be about three-quarters of a mile.

"They opened fire on the flotilla and I have two impressions of their fire, firstly that it was most inaccurate, and secondly, that the big ship on the left was firing very slowly, first her forward guns and then her after guns, and so on. The *Legion* stated that she had the individual and undivided attention of one of her three gun turrets and that it was not so 'inaccurate'! The big ship was later identified as a Littorio class battleship.

"The flotilla opened fire with all the guns that would bear. I think our firing was pretty accurate as we could see hits both forward and aft. Our cruisers were following us up to support the attack and firing as well.

"I have no recollection of any enemy fire that seemed uncomfortably close, but can remember seeing some salvoes fall fairly near other ships of the flotilla, as we went in in broad port quarter line, in the order *Jervis*, *Kipling*, *Kelvin*, *Kingston*, *Legion*.

"The range seemed to take an unconscionably long time to shorten—the fact, of course, being we had not started, as we expected to do, from fine on the bow of the enemy, but from very broad on his bow and so our rate of approach was much reduced.

"When the range of the nearest enemy from the *Jervis* was

about 7000 yards it was grand to see the second ship in the enemy line lose her nerve. She turned and steered straight away from us, making volumes of black smoke.

"Eventually the range was down to the 6000 yards for which we had been waiting—it was one of the longest three miles I have ever steamed to reach it—and we were able to turn and fire torpedoes.

"We turned—all of us more or less at once—and some twenty-four torpedoes started off towards the enemy line. The *Legion*, who was on the left of our line, was the ship that got nearest to the enemy when firing, her range from them at that time being about 4500 yards.

"As soon as we turned to the prearranged course for retiring our ships started to make smoke to cover their get-away. This, of course, blanked our view of what the enemy was doing, and we did not know till later that just after we fired he turned tail and made tracks northwards for home.

"We were still doing 28 knots when we turned, but as we had to turn head into the wind and sea we very quickly had to reduce down to 20 knots. The few moments before we did so brought about four green seas over the forecastle and drowned us with spray on the bridge.

"The *Kingston*, meanwhile, had been unlucky, as just before turning to fire her torpedoes she was hit in the engine-room and boiler-room by a salvo which almost stopped her. However, she just managed to turn and get her torpedoes off before coming to a full stop. Her captain and crew did grand work and got her going again, and I sent her off to join the convoy so as to get to Malta for repairs.

"Meanwhile the Twenty-second Flotilla, now away to the south of us, had turned round to make a torpedo attack when we had finished, but found the enemy going hell-for-leather north and out of torpedo range. He reported a hit as of a torpedo on the end ship of the enemy line, and we in the *Jervis* were firmly convinced that it was one of our torpedoes, aimed at the third ship when they were steaming south, which had caught the end ship when they had turned north. This ship we afterwards learned was considered to be a Littorio class battleship.

"Anyway, after that no more was seen of the enemy surface forces who made off for home as fast as they could. The convoy resumed its course for Malta, whilst Admiral Vian had the problem

of getting his cruisers and destroyers out of enemy range and back to Alexandria in the teeth of a howling gale, with dusk falling.

"I remember just after retiring from the torpedo attack finding the *Kelvin* lying stopped. Thinking she had been damaged we asked what was the matter and if we could help. Her Commanding Officer replied that he was 'only picking up a man who had gone over-board.'

"That night was most unpleasant. We were belting into the sea and wind at the highest speed considered safe, which had to be reduced to about 14 knots, and the whole ship was completely flooded and the mess decks feet deep in water. However, it had to be done as we were still very much in 'Tom Tiddler's Ground,' and could expect heavy air attacks as long as we were there.

"Another difficulty was that our force was split up into a number of small units all holding on to one another with their teeth during the night, which was particularly dark and unpleasant.

"However, all were there when day dawned and we sorted ourselves out. The weather gradually improved and eventually, after a few more air and torpedo bomber attacks, we arrived at Alexandria where we were given a terrific reception.

"It was unfortunate that I should have chosen the moment when the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, kindly came on board the *Jervis* on our arrival on 24th March, to have my first bath since leaving harbour on 20th March and to have to greet him in a dressing-gown!"

Again in November, 1942, Poland was concerned with the passage of a convoy to Malta. Then he and his flotilla were based on Malta for a time and operated against R6mmel's lines of communication from Italy and Sicily to Libya.

In December, Poland, in the *Jervis*, with three other destroyers, found and sank a small Italian destroyer. This was the only remaining escort of an enemy convoy which had been caught off the Kerkennah Bank by the Fleet Air Arm, who had destroyed all the ships in convoy and the other escorts.

Not long afterwards Poland, this time working with the Royal Air Force, destroyed a 1500-ton petrol and ammunition ship in the Gulf of Gabes.

In January, 1943, Poland was relieved, and he flew home. After a short leave he became Naval Officer in Charge in the Isle of Man

and Captain of H.M.S. *St. George*, where the boys of the Royal Navy are being trained.

Poland was born in Kent in 1895, but has lived nearly all his life in Cornwall and Devonshire. His father was in the Royal Navy before him, and was present at the bombardment of Alexandria and landed with the Naval Brigade in 1882, but was invalided out of the Service as a young Lieutenant after having been injured in a gun accident. During the last war he was again called up for service and was in charge of the coast from St. Abb's Head to Montrose.

SIR ALFRED DUDLEY PICKMAN ROGERS POUND

G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O.

Admiral of the Fleet

WINSTON CHURCHILL is the only man in England who has borne a greater weight of responsibility in this war than Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, who has been First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff since June, 1939.

People have marvelled at how Winston Churchill stands the strain. It is due in no small measure to his amazing facility for completely dissociating himself from his work for short periods of complete rest.

Dudley Pound has the same facility for taking complete rest during short periods, and it is due to this that he has been able to work such long hours throughout the war.

One of the reasons why Dudley Pound has been able to bear the strain is that he de-centralises as much as possible and makes the fullest use of his staff. This he does with confidence, since his gift for picking able men has resulted in the formation of a staff upon whom he can implicitly rely.

The First Sea Lord is always available for discussion of the many thousands of problems inherent in the waging of the greatest sea war in history. For the British Empire all defence and every offensive must depend upon the war at sea, since modern war is warfare of supply, and the supplies for all three Services, for the civilian population, and for production, have to reach the British Isles by sea.

Sir Dudley Pound is often asked at the shortest notice to take decisions which may alter the course of history. The survival of the British Empire through the last few years, and the gradual march of the cause of the United Nations from desperate defence to calculated offence, are testimonials to the soundness of the decisions which had been taken by the Chief of the Naval Staff.

There are many who tend to demand immediate and spectacular dividends from Britain's sea power. These fail to realise that sea power is built up over many years and operates comparatively

slowly but utterly relentlessly; but that it can be frittered away in a few minutes. If that happened the defeat of the United Nations would be inevitable.

It may be truly said that, in his position of disposing and wielding our sea power, Dudley Pound has made sure of ultimate victory rather than courted defeat by spectacular but unjustifiable moves. It was said of Jellicoe at the Battle of Jutland that he was the only man who could have lost the war in an afternoon. There have been many such periods during Dudley Pound's tenure of office as First Sea Lord, but they have all been weathered. In four years of war the British Empire has turned many dangerous corners, all of which have been intimately concerned with "the sea affair." The Chief of the Naval Staff has played a major part in steering our fortunes round those dangerous corners and bringing us to the point whence we can see a straight road leading to victory, with the ever-growing sea-power of the United Nations enabling the offensive to be taken on the grand scale at sea, in the air, and on land.

The man who has piloted the Royal Navy through the most critical years in its history, and who has played no inconsiderable part in securing the full co-operation of the two English-speaking navies towards the common goal is himself half American. Dudley Pound's mother was Elizabeth Rogers of Boston, U.S.A., and in his early days an uncle offered him an option in the great American banking concern of Pierpont Morgan. It is interesting to speculate on the part Dudley Pound might have played in current affairs if that offer had been accepted.

As a boy, Dudley Pound was very fond of horses, and wished to go into the cavalry. This desire was, however, discouraged by his parents for financial reasons. Then one day he was standing on Stokes Bay pier in Spithead when a naval cutter in charge of a midshipman came in under sail and smartly alongside the pier. Young Dudley Pound was tremendously impressed, and transferred his allegiance from horses to the sea, and duly entered the Royal Navy as a cadet on January 15th, 1891.

Pound's naval career nearly came to an end while he was still a midshipman. On a picnic one day a methylated spirit lamp blew up and he was so badly burned that it was feared for some time that he would lose his sight. He was then serving in the *Royal Sovereign*, flagship of Admiral Fairfax.

Dudley Pound then went to China. Those were the bad old days, and the ship to which he was appointed was far from being smart or efficient. In her Pound learnt, if nothing else, how things should *not* be done. Nor was he more fortunate in the ship in which he took passage home from China after a year on that station. The ship was commanded by the greatest martinet of the day, by whose orders liberty men were met at the gangway by marines armed with belaying pins, who had orders to break the collar bones of any men the worse for liquor or giving trouble.

After arriving home, Pound served for a year as Midshipman of the Crosstrees in the *Calypso*, one of the sailing ships of the old Training Squadron. His experience in that ship led him to form opinions which he still holds. He found that things which seemed dangerous lost their danger if one knew how to do them, and learnt that smartness, precision, and speed in doing things were the secrets of success and safety. Dudley Pound has never forgotten those lessons, and he has applied them with conspicuous success to the handling of powerful steamships. The memories of those days and knowledge of the value which they proved to him made him one of the strongest advocates for the reintroduction of sail training in the Royal Navy, had this been possible. It is curious that other contemporary naval officers, notably Lord Chatfield, have disagreed so completely with Dudley Pound on this point.

In those days young officers had to serve for three years as midshipmen and be nineteen years of age before qualifying for promotion to Sub-Lieutenant. Pound had the unusual experience, after completing his three years as midshipman, of having to wait six weeks for his nineteenth birthday before he could be promoted.

As a sub-lieutenant Dudley Pound was appointed to the destroyer *Opossum*, which was commanded by Lieutenant Roger Keyes.

In tracing the career of Dudley Pound one is struck by the frequency of his contacts with two other great naval officers—Roger Keyes and William Wordsworth Fisher. All three were keen young officers, and there is no doubt that their characters reacted upon one another and that each unconsciously contributed to the other's greatness. Impatience and a desire that things should always be done as quickly as possible animated all three. Fisher was a great seaman and proved eventually a great Fleet Commander; Roger Keyes was a great leader, impulsive and volatile; Dudley Pound

tempered impatience with intellectual capacity and technical knowledge.

From the *Opossum* Dudley Pound went to H.M.S. *Magnificent*, the second flagship of the Channel Fleet, which wore the flag of one of the most irascible and eccentric flag officers ever to have served afloat. Pound's first job in the *Magnificent* was to combine the duties of Signal Mate and Mate of the Upper Deck. One day, however, the captain sent him to the Admiral with instructions to make the latter realise that he was wrongly interpreting a certain signal. Pound succeeded, and next day the Admiral asked him to become his Flag Lieutenant.

The Admiral had a predilection for putting officers under arrest. On one occasion Dudley Pound was put under arrest and received back into grace no less than twelve times while the ship was proceeding from the Homoeaze to Plymouth Sound!

One of the greatest eccentricities of that Admiral was a passion for quadrilles on bicycles. He had, in fact, written a book on "bicycle quadrilles." One of Dudley Pound's most vivid recollections of this period in his career was a visit to Dunvegan, in the Isle of Skye. There the Admiral found what he considered the ideal lawn for "bicycle quadrilles," and asked the owner if he might demonstrate these curious evolutions. The suggestion was welcomed by the owner, who sensed rare entertainment for his house party.

Eight junior midshipmen were duly conscripted, drilled on foot on the *Magnificent's* quarter-deck, and eight bicycles were borrowed for them. On the appointed day the eight "snotties" appeared on the lawn in fear and trembling with their borrowed bicycles. The soft and sloping lawn, several excited Scotch terriers, the terror of the midshipmen and the temper of their Admiral, all contributed to the ultimate fiasco. In ten seconds the centre of the lawn was adorned by a heap of broken bicycles and wounded midshipmen, around whom danced the Admiral, nearly bursting his lungs with blasts on his whistle and interspersing these with bursts of language which led the ladies of the house party to beat a hasty retreat. There were no more "bicycle quadrilles."

On leaving the *Magnificent* Pound qualified as a Torpedo Lieutenant. While doing so he had the valuable experience of blowing up the wreck of the *Viper*, the first turbine-driven destroyer, which

had run aground on the Renonquet Rocks near Alderney during manœuvres.

Pound's first job as a qualified specialist was as Torpedo Lieutenant of the flagship of the Pacific Station, where he gained varied and valuable experience, since he was saddled with every conceivable odd job, including that *bête-noir* of naval officers—the running of the ship's canteen.

The Pacific Station, however, gave Dudley Pound plenty of opportunity for the sports which he still loves—shooting and fishing. In two years on that station he fished every river within miles of every anchorage they used, and walked uncounted miles in search of all types of game. Dudley Pound is a sportsman in the best sense of the word. If he has fished for hours and lost the only fish he hooked, or if he has walked twenty miles with a gun and fired no more than one cartridge, he will not be disappointed. It is the joy he gets out of it rather than the tangible results which make for him “a good day.”

When he got back from the Pacific Dudley Pound was looking forward to six weeks foreign service leave, but when he arrived at Spithead he was confronted with an order to commence a wireless telegraphy course at once, and to join H.M.S. *King Edward VII.*, the flagship of Admiral Sir William May, in three weeks' time.

H.M.S. *King Edward VII.* was a nightmare to Dudley Pound. As Torpedo Lieutenant he was responsible for the whole electrical installation of the ship as well as the torpedoes, and the *King Edward VII.* was the first ship to have any considerable amount of electrical gear, all of a new and untried type.

In this ship, however, Pound demonstrated that it was possible to go through a Battle Practice without any misfires—an unheard-of triumph in those days. His passion for getting things done “at the rush” also bore fruit. He showed that it was possible to reload the submerged torpedo tubes rapidly. This he did, although it entailed some risk of having both ends of the torpedo tube open at the same time. On one occasion during an inspection by the Commander-in-Chief, the sea poured into the “flat” and reached a depth of four feet. The Commander-in-Chief was not best pleased, and the laconic statement in the Inspection Report that “Rapid loading was not well carried out” hardly did justice to the fact that rapid reloading of the tubes was an essential factor in fighting efficiency.

It was in H.M.S. *King Edward VII.* that Dudley Pound was for the first time shipmates with William Wordsworth Fisher, who was Gunnery Officer and First Lieutenant. It was an association which was to continue until both men served together in high command.

Towards the end of the *King Edward VII.*'s commission the Captain asked Dudley Pound what appointment he would like next. Pound said that he had heard that H.M.S. *Queen* was soon to commission as flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet and that he would like to go to her as First Lieutenant. A few days later, however, the Captain of the *King Edward VII.* sent for Pound, told him that he had heard from the Captain of the *Queen* that he already had a First Lieutenant and again asked him what he would like to do. Pound said that he would like to go to the *Queen* as Second Lieutenant.

This got the Captain on the raw, for Pound had been First Lieutenant of the *King Edward VII.* since W. W. Fisher had left some months before. He exploded: "After being First Lieutenant of *my* ship I consider it an insult that you should wish to go as Second Lieutenant of any ship. Go away and come back in twenty-four hours with some sensible suggestion."

Twenty-four hours later Pound was again before his Captain.

"Well, have you come to your senses?"

"I hope so, sir."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I should like to go as Second Lieutenant of the *Queen*, sir."

There was a pregnant pause. Then: "Well, if you will be a damned fool, don't blame me."

So Pound went to the *Queen*, but the First Lieutenant who had been selected went sick, and Dudley Pound commissioned the ship as First Lieutenant.

That incident is illustrative of Pound's character. He does not leap at decisions without giving a problem deep consideration, but having once made his decision he does not lightly abandon it.

In those days, wireless telegraphy was yet another complication thrown upon the shoulders of the torpedo officer. One of the tests of a ship's efficiency in the new science was the reading of the news bulletins transmitted by wireless from the station at Poldhu. Each ship had to send what she read of these news bulletins to the flagship, where they were marked on a competitive basis.

For some time the torpedo officer of one ship in the squadron acquired great merit for achieving results far better than any other ship, but one day it was discovered that the Reuter's afternoon news service was practically the same as the bulletins received from Poldhu at night. The enterprising torpedo officer had made arrangements to collect the afternoon Reuter's service and so avoided the laborious and chancy business of trying to take in Poldhu's wireless messages!

It was while Dudley Pound was serving in H.M.S. *Queen* that he was married, in the Cathedral at Malta, to Miss Whitehead. From that day until her death in 1943 Lady Pound, as she became, was not only a great help and encouragement to her husband, but over a period of many years she did great work for the wives and families of naval officers and ratings. In particular she became guide, philosopher and friend to a very large number of the "young marrieds" of the Royal Navy, particularly in the Mediterranean when Dudley Pound was Commander-in-Chief.

After the commission in the *Queen*, Dudley Pound went to the Admiralty on the torpedo side of the Department of the Director of Naval Ordnance, and was promoted to Commander shortly afterwards.

It was at this time that there took place the famous "Dreadnought Hoax." Certain young men-about-town sent to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, whose flag was flying in the *Dreadnought*, a forged telegram purporting to come from the Foreign Office stating that certain important Eastern potentates intended to visit the *Dreadnought*, and asking that they should be suitably treated and shown over the wonderful new ship. The young men then disguised themselves as Orientals and duly went on board the *Dreadnought*, where they were received with proper ceremony and shown round the ship by William Wordsworth Fisher, who was the Flag Commander. The hoax was certainly well staged. Nobody suspected anything wrong, and the perpetrators returned to London without having been "bowled out."

The story flew round London and got into the newspapers, with large headlines. William Wordsworth Fisher was not the man to lie down under ridicule of that sort. He felt that the Navy had to be avenged and that the insult to his Commander-in-Chief must be wiped out; moreover, he himself had a grudge to work off, since he had personally shown the "hoaxers" round the *Dreadnought*.

Fisher telegraphed to Dudley Pound, his old shipmate of the *King Edward VII.* to meet him in London. The two held council and decided that each of the "hoaxers" must be given "a dozen of the best" to teach them a lesson. The difficulty was to find out who the perpetrators were. Much time and energy led to their discovery, and then Dudley Pound and William Fisher carried out a series of raids, which resulted in the punishment being duly inflicted upon the "hoaxers" in such varied places as Hampstead Heath, Dudley Pound's room in the Admiralty, and a mews.

Dudley Pound's next appointment was as Commander of H.M.S. *Superb*. The fleet regatta was to take place six months after Dudley Pound joined the ship, and the *Superb's* ship's company had never distinguished itself in any form of sport. Dudley Pound threw himself into the task of making that ship's company determined to do well in the regatta. This he did, not for the mere satisfaction of seeing crews from his ship win races, but because he recognised that the true value of such competitive sports lay in the opportunity of the officers to foster among their men an enthusiastic team spirit and a will to win. In his task Pound was favoured by his own physique. He was fit, and stronger than most men, and therefore never had to ask of a man more than he could do himself. The *Superb* swept the board at the Fleet Regatta; under Dudley Pound's driving energy her ship's company had found itself.

On June 30th, 1911, ship's steward Jones and a cooper named Newham entered one of the *Superb's* holds in which potatoes had been stored and both were overcome by the foul air. They were discovered by an able seaman named Coll, who bravely went to their assistance but was himself overcome by the poisonous fumes. Commander Pound and Gunner O'Halloran, with Petty Officer Bartlett, who volunteered to go to the rescue, were then lowered into the hold. Bartlett soon succumbed and was hauled up unconscious, but Pound and O'Halloran persevered and were able to send up the three unconscious men before being themselves hauled up out of the hold. Artificial respiration was tried on the three men, but unfortunately without avail. For this very gallant action Dudley Pound was awarded the Royal Humane Society's Medal, the dark blue ribbon of which he wears on the right breast of his uniform.

When Dudley Pound's time was up in the *Superb* the Royal Naval Staff College had just been established, and he was asked to go to

it as an instructor—a post which he accepted. The fact that Pound was offered the job was significant, for it showed that those in authority had remarked his intellectual ability as well as his drive, leadership, and technical qualifications.

Dudley Pound, however, stayed only a year at the Staff College. At the end of that time he was asked by W. W. Fisher, then Captain of H.M.S. *St. Vincent*, to go to sea as his Commander. With Pound the call of a sea appointment has always been irresistible, and he accepted Fisher's offer, much against the advice of the Admiral in charge of the Staff College.

It was in June, 1914, that Dudley Pound left the Staff College for H.M.S. *St. Vincent*. That his choice was wise was shown by events. War broke out in August, and in December Pound was promoted to Captain, while his Staff College contemporaries found themselves answering telephones in the Admiralty and, without exception, failed to get their promotion.

As a junior captain Dudley Pound went to the Admiralty for a short time as Second Naval Assistant to Lord (Jackie) Fisher, the then First Sea Lord. Then he was appointed to H.M.S. *Colossus* as Flag Captain. In that ship he was present at the Battle of Jutland, and was commended for his services in that action. Dudley Pound is the only officer on the Active List of the Royal Navy to-day who commanded a capital ship at the Battle of Jutland.

After fifteen months in the *Colossus* Pound was recalled to the Admiralty. It had at last been recognised that nearly everybody in the Admiralty was so snowed under with paper work that there was no section of the Naval Staff which had time to think. Dudley Pound was told to organise a "thinking party." After some difficulty he was able to collect a small staff, but was quite unable to secure any accommodation for them. Pound's team were called Section 15 of the Operations Division, and they were eventually housed in a bedroom in Admiralty House, where the Director of Operations slept. Some three months later it was recognised that the Admiralty staff organisation had been grossly deficient on the constructive operational side and the so-called Section 15 of the Operations Division was expanded and formed into the Plans Division of the Naval Staff with a flag officer as Director.

Dudley Pound was in this way closely concerned with the reorganisation of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty to meet modern requirements. It is, in fact, no exaggeration to say that the modern

Naval Staff organisation grew with Dudley Pound, who was to be Chief of that staff in war.

From the Admiralty Dudley Pound went to sea as Captain of the battle-cruiser *Repulse*, where he was able to put into practice his belief that fear of danger disappears in face of good seamanship and bold, but precise, handling.

These were the years immediately following the war of 1914-18. Dudley Pound had amassed a varied and valuable experience both afloat and in staff appointments. He was now in command of a capital ship, and his character had, to a great extent, been formed. He was still as impatient of delay as he had been as a midshipman. He still believed, as he does to this day, that when something has to be done it is best done at full speed. He had learnt to work his men hard, but to work himself even harder, conforming to a standard so high that it existed only in his own mind and restless spirit. The fool and the man whose seamanship consisted of going "softly catch monkey" to avoid possibility of trouble, he had no use for. He had learnt to believe in initiative and self-reliance and to admire brains when they were allied to courage but despise them when they served as a cloak for professional incompetence or were regarded as a scaling ladder for promotion. In other words, Dudley Pound had grown into an experienced realist.

After commanding the *Repulse* for two years Pound returned to the Admiralty as Director of the Plans Division of the Naval Staff—the division which he had helped to form some years before. In this capacity he attended the Lausanne Conference which at last established peace between the Allies and Turkey. He had also much to do with the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the initial stages of naval disarmament by agreement which followed the Washington Naval Conference and Treaty of 1922.

This was Dudley Pound's introduction to the manifold international and political problems so intimately connected with the strength and plans of a world-wide maritime empire. He held this appointment for three years, and it gave him insight and experience, which was to be of immense value to him in later years, when he found himself confronted with some of the most difficult international problems which have ever faced a naval officer.

After three years as Director of Plans, Dudley Pound went to the Mediterranean Fleet as Chief of Staff to Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, the Commander-in-Chief. This was his second association

with Roger Keyes, whose drive matched that of Dudley Pound, but who was so much more volatile in taking decisions. They worked well together, and the state of training of the Mediterranean Fleet was considerably improved in consequence.

Pound's spell as Chief of Staff in the Mediterranean was followed by another period of service at the Admiralty—this time as Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff. Once again one is struck by the way in which Pound and the modern Naval Staff "grew up" together.

Dudley Pound then hoisted his flag at sea in command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this phase in his career. The battle-cruisers were large, powerful, and fast ships. Under the influence of economy and the terrific competition for promotion, "safety first" slogans were beginning to rule the fleet. They were abhorrent to Dudley Pound, and he would have nothing to do with them. He handled his battle-cruisers at high speed as if they had been picket boats, and the efficiency of the squadron soon became a byword in consequence. Speed, precision and boldness in handling ships—those were the mainstays of Pound's philosophy. Other navies had nobody to teach men that a ship is a ship and should be handled as such irrespective of her value, and those navies have been found wanting in war although they possessed squadrons of very fast and powerful ships.

Pound's training of the battle-cruisers, moreover, has produced the ability to handle the new battleships—with speeds higher than the battle-cruisers—and the principles of the battle tactics of these new ships. With the building of battleships faster than battle-cruisers the latter type died out, but much of Pound's battle-cruiser practice is battle-fleet practice to-day.

From the Battle Cruiser Squadron Dudley Pound returned to a Staff appointment and served for a short time with the Disarmament Conference. Here his realism and honesty raised something of a storm among the representatives of the Great Powers, but evoked the enthusiastic commendation of a representative of one of the smaller Powers, who characterised Dudley Pound as the only honest man attending the conference! This "pothor" was caused because Pound pointed out that any nation building warships for another Power would, in the event of war, at once take them over and devote them to its own use. Common sense is often unacceptable at the international council table.

Pound then became Second Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Personnel, a post which he held from August, 1932 to September, 1935. They were difficult years, when the Royal Navy had been cut below "the edge of risk"; when there was little or no manning reserve and when the Second Sea Lord had at his disposal only a fraction of the number of appointments for which there were deserving officers waiting.

In October, 1935, Dudley Pound was nominated as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, which threatened at any moment to become the cockpit of Europe as a result of Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia and the League of Nations' attempt to curb Italy by imposing sanctions at British instigation. The situation was critical and dangerous in the extreme.

The Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean was then Admiral Sir William Wordsworth Fisher. He had been in command in the Mediterranean for more than two years and had, immediately before that, been Second in Command of the Mediterranean Fleet for a similar period. Not only did he know the Mediterranean like the palm of his hand, but he was well versed in the international situation, as well as the problems of strategy and supply inherent in the dangerous circumstances then existing.

Pound was therefore not surprised when he was told that the Board of Admiralty had decided that it was undesirable to change Commanders-in-Chief at such a time.

What happened then is most revealing of Dudley Pound's character. Hearing that a relief was required for Sir William Fisher's Chief of Staff, Dudley Pound volunteered for the appointment and was accepted.

His appointment as Chief of the Staff to the Commander-in-Chief created two records. Not only was he the first officer of full Admiral's rank to serve as Chief of Staff to a Commander-in-Chief, but he was also the first Flag Officer to hold the appointment of Chief of Staff to a Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in the rank of both Admiral and Commodore.

This well illustrates Sir Dudley Pound's tenet that the claims of Service must always come first. It is a tenet which he holds passionately, and there have been many demonstrations of it during the years of his office as First Sea Lord. If he is convinced that any course of action will be of benefit to the Allied war effort and to

the Royal Navy, no amount of argument or criticism will divert him from that course.

This adherence to a decision once taken is in no sense obstinacy. In coming to a decision he will weigh most carefully all the arguments for and against, and he will always take changing circumstances into full account. He has the gift of being able to sift evidence and arguments thoroughly and is able quickly to detect and reject fallacious arguments. This he does by going straight to the essentials; but he leaves unconsidered no minor point which may affect the issue.

By the spring of 1936 the Mediterranean situation had clarified, and on March 20th of that year Sir Dudley Pound hoisted his flag as Commander-in-Chief.

There were still problems in plenty to be dealt with. The crisis had imposed strain and even hardship upon the naval personnel, many of whom had been required to remain at their posts long after they had been due to return to England for well-earned leave. There was absolutely no foundation for the rumours of unrest in the Mediterranean Fleet which circulated from time to time, but it required a strong man and a sympathetic man to handle the problems of tens of thousands of men called upon to live under war conditions in time of peace.

Close upon the Abyssinian crisis followed the Spanish Civil War, in which the Royal Navy was called upon to maintain strict neutrality, "keep the ring," and serve humanity under the most trying and exacting conditions. That both parties in the struggle disliked and distrusted the activities of His Majesty's ships is the strongest proof possible that these maintained strict impartiality in the Civil War, whilst doing their utmost to alleviate the suffering and guard British nationals.

The situation was made no easier by the blatantly partisan attitude of other Powers, who not only sought to establish in Spain a permanent Government conforming to their own ideologies, but regarded the war as a heaven-sent opportunity to try out their own weapons and theories of war. National susceptibilities had to be served, and international jealousies carefully watched. The success of the Royal Navy in these difficult circumstances was the subject of a signal from the First Lord of the Admiralty to Sir Dudley Pound in the autumn of 1937. In it the First Lord said: "The difficult and onerous task that has been imposed upon the Royal

Navy during the past year has been carried out in a manner that has earned the admiration of their fellow countrymen and of the world." This was due in no small measure to Dudley Pound, who laid down the principles upon which the ships were to work and who had fostered mutual understanding and trust between himself and his captains and commanders of squadrons, so that they knew and interpreted his wishes without having to refer every problem to him.

When, in 1937, so-called "pirate" submarines began to operate off the coasts of Spain, a hastily summoned international conference at Nyon, near Geneva, agreed that the threat should be met by naval patrols. Needless to say the chief burden of these patrols fell upon the Royal Navy, but considerations of national prestige led other nations to require a share in the patrols. An area system was agreed upon at Nyon in September, with each country responsible for the patrols in a specified sector of the waters off the Spanish coast; and the Nyon conference went some way towards the delimitation of these zones. The most difficult and delicate part of the negotiations was, however, left to Admiral Sir Dudley Pound as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean. This was nothing less than the delimitation of the British, French and Italian patrol areas in the Mediterranean.

It must be remembered that Italy and Germany were openly backing General Franco in the Spanish Civil War and that France was supporting, morally if not materially, the Spanish republican government, so that Pound's task bristled with international complications. Nor was the situation in any way improved when Germany ran out of the course in high dudgeon after the bombing of the "pocket battleship" *Deutschland*.

Admiral Sir Dudley Pound met the French Admirals Esteva and Bléry and the Italian Admiral Bernotti at Bizerta in October, and it was largely due to the firmness and tact of the British Commander-in-Chief that this prickly international problem was successfully and amicably solved.

While international problems dominated the Mediterranean scene, the training of the fleet for war had to continue. When Flag Captain of H.M.S. *Colossus*, Dudley Pound had evolved a series of tactical drills and exercises designed to extract the maximum amount of training value from the short time available for ships exercising under way in Scapa Flow. As Chief of Staff to Sir Roger

Keyes, Pound had enlarged upon these exercises, and now, as Commander-in-Chief, he perfected them, so that ships under his command should derive the greatest possible benefit from the short opportunities available and no time was ever wasted.

Pound worked his men hard, but he worked himself harder, and he expected them to play hard too, whenever they got the chance. One of his staff once remarked to him that his captains would be tired out and would have no time to study the lessons of one exercise before embarking upon another. Pound retorted that captains would have to spend long hours on the bridge in wartime and must therefore be trained to do so in peace, and that he was prepared to bet that, human nature being what it is, captains would probably relax instead of studying the last exercise if an interval were allowed between them.

To Pound the training of the fleet at sea was a labour of love. He was never so happy as when on the bridge, training his fleet to meet every emergency, insisting upon captains handling their ships boldly at speed, and demanding instantaneous action and initiative.

Towards the end of his three years as Commander-in-Chief, Dudley Pound was offered the alternative of going as Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, which would probably have been a three-year appointment, or having an additional year in command of the fleet with nothing but retirement to follow. He chose the latter without hesitation and was looking forward to another year afloat when the serious illness and subsequent death of the then First Sea Lord, Sir Roger Backhouse, caused his return to England, where he assumed the high office of First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff during those difficult months immediately preceding the outbreak of war. His appointment was welcomed by the Navy, which considered that Dudley Pound was the right man for the job.

It has been said in the past of officers rising to this highest appointment in the Royal Navy that their accession to an office having something of a political as well as a naval flavour has been due to their selection by the politicians then in office. This is a calumny. Were it true, First Sea Lords would change with the changes in the Government. In the case of Sir Dudley Pound one has only to point to the fact that he became First Sea Lord when Winston Churchill and A. V. Alexander, two men who trust him

implicitly and set the greatest store by his judgment, were neither of them in political office.

One of Dudley Pound's first responsibilities as First Sea Lord was preparing the Navy for quick mobilisation. Much preliminary work had been done when the fleet had been mobilised at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938, and during the following year, but much still remained to be done. In this task Pound's experience during the Mediterranean crisis, when everything had had to be improvised in the absence of carefully laid plans, served him well. And when the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Stanhope, issued orders that the Navy was to be mobilised for war, that wise decision owed a great deal to the sound advice of the First Sea Lord. The Reserve Fleet, too, had been brought up to strength with its ships fully manned and had carried out exercises and been reviewed by the King. The Naval Staff, under Pound, was taking precautions in time.

The Royal Navy has been fighting at sea every day since September 3rd, 1939. When there appeared to be stalemate between the Maginot and the Siegfried Lines, a life and death struggle was going on at sea. The Navy smiled grimly when it heard of people talking about the "phoney war." The men at sea did wonders, but it must not be forgotten that the ultimate responsibility for these actions, and indeed for the survival of the nation through the protection of the vital sea communications, rested upon the First Sea Lord. Moreover, he had to plan for the future, and the mere fact that, when the peril of invasion was imminent, we were able to import a million rifles and ammunition for the Home Guard, shows that these plans were soundly laid. Otherwise they must have collapsed under the strain of totally unpredictable circumstances.

During the "phoney war" period, the war at sea was being waged ceaselessly against the U-boats. That in itself demanded the trebling of our anti-submarine forces in less than three months.

There was also another and very grave danger to our vital shipping. On September 30th, 1939, the British ship *Clement* was sunk off Pernambuco by a German "pocket battleship." Other ships became overdue in the succeeding weeks. It was clear that a very grave threat was developing upon the distant ocean trade routes through the German employment as commerce raiders of a type of warship which, theoretically at least, could show a clean pair of

heels to any battleship and would be more than a match for any cruiser.

The hunt, which ranged over the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, led to the Battle of the River Plate, and the ignominious scuttling of the German "pocket battleship," *Admiral Graf Spee*, was on.

The organisation behind that great hunt was stupendous. Ships had to be provided without thinning our forces elsewhere to an extent where they could no longer discharge their essential commitments. Fuel and stores had to be provided at short notice in the most unlikely places. Steps had to be taken to minimise the damage which the raider might do before being hunted down. All these arrangements were made at the Admiralty under the personal direction of Admiral Sir Dudley Pound and Mr. Winston Churchill, who was then First Lord.

Even when the *Admiral Graf Spee* had been hounded into the neutral harbour of Montevideo the task of the Admiralty was by no means over. The First Sea Lord had ample cause for anxiety. He knew the geographical factors involved. He knew of the damage to the *Exeter* and *Ajax* and that Commodore Harwood's two cruisers had only twelve 6-inch guns and very little ammunition to pit against the German ship's six 11-inch guns and eight 5.9-inch guns. He well appreciated the urgent need for reinforcing the ships off the Plate, but he realised the immense distances and difficulties involved. The following passage from the official account of the Battle of the River Plate is a triumph of under-statement:

"Meanwhile, other operations were set on foot by the Admiralty. Orders were given for the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Ark Royal* and the battle-cruiser H.M.S. *Renown*, and other ships, all of which had been operating some 3000 miles away, to proceed at once to the South American coast, and steps were taken to ensure that adequate supplies of fuel would be available at various strategic points."

In October there appeared a new menace at sea in the form of the magnetic mine. Many ships were lost and the situation threatened to become very serious. Hitler's vaunted "secret weapon" was, however, discovered, and its threat largely neutralised, mainly through great feats of organisation by the Minesweeping Division of the Naval Staff and the Torpedo and Mining Department under the Controller of the Navy. The responsibility was, of course, that of the First Sea Lord.

In April, 1940, "blitzkrieg" took the place of "phoney war." As



Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound

a result, the whole strategic outlook of the war at sea was abruptly and completely changed.

It has been said with justice by a Minister of the Crown that any naval strategist, faced with the situation obtaining towards the end of the summer of 1940, would have stated categorically that the position of Great Britain was hopeless. Few men in possession of the full facts would have foreseen anything better than the acceptance of such terms of peace as might be offered by Hitler.

Consider the situation. Germany, with a potentially powerful fleet, a great number of U-boats and an enormous air force, dominated the European coast from the North Cape to the Franco-Spanish frontier.

The chief threats to our vital trade routes were U-boats, with a subsidiary threat created by the possibility of strong surface raiders working in the more distant areas, and the additional threat of air attack and mine warfare in coastal waters. The change in the strategical situation meant that the U-boats were able to operate from Norwegian and French Atlantic ports. By so doing they could minimise the risk of the passage to and from their operational areas and the time spent on passage. They could therefore increase their period on patrol. One U-boat, in fact, became almost as great a threat as two U-boats before the fall of France. Nor was this all. Building and refitting facilities many hundreds of miles nearer the battle in the Atlantic had fallen into German hands.

From the point of view of mining and air attack the change in the situation was somewhat similar but perhaps not so grave. Shipping, however, had to be protected against air attack many hundreds of miles out in the Atlantic, a protection which had formerly been visualised as necessary only for North Sea convoys. The scope and extent of the German minelaying campaign also increased.

It was not only the advantages secured by Germany which had to be considered. There was also British inadequacy. The defection of France had robbed us of the forces and bases which had dominated the Western Mediterranean, and also of considerable patrol and escort forces for the protection of the Atlantic trade routes. Dangerous gaps had to be filled everywhere, and this at a time when more than half of the total destroyer strength of the Royal Navy had either been sunk in operations or was in the dockyards being repaired.

No First Sea Lord has been faced with so grim a prospect. There is no doubt that the unrelenting determination of Winston Churchill pulled Britain through the most terrible crisis in her history, but it should never be forgotten that the fundamental problem, with Britain's initial war potential scattered over a continent in enemy hands, was one of supply, and of supply by sea.

Nobody realised this better than Dudley Pound, but his courage and resolution matched those of his Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Like Winston Churchill, Pound will never give up, never admit defeat. Had it not been so, Britain must have gone under.

Pound, of course, is the last man to take any credit for the weathering of that storm. He may have been conscious of doing his duty, but he was certainly not conscious of the fact that he was making history. He merely did his tireless best—and a superb best it was. Not only was the storm weathered, but before long the Royal Navy began to regain a position in which it could operate offensively.

In addition to other and more immediate problems, the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, under Pound's direction, were working upon the problems of close co-ordination between the Admiralty and a Commander-in-Chief at sea. This may seem to the layman to be a simple matter of common sense. Actually it was most complicated. The necessity of preserving "wireless silence" by a fleet at sea is only one of the many considerations involved. It is no exaggeration to say that close co-operation between a fleet at sea and the Admiralty in wartime presents one of the greatest problems in the higher direction of the war at sea.

Whilst leaving the direction of the forces to the Commander-in-Chief so long as he is able to make signals, the Admiralty must be ready to take control instantaneously and to retain it until the Commander-in-Chief decides that he can again break "wireless silence."

Proof of the success of the Naval Staff under Pound in solving this problem was forthcoming during the long chase and subsequent destruction of the *Bismarck*. Never before had so long or so close a chase been pursued at high speed. A large number of forces were at sea. It was essential that they should be co-ordinated to the over-riding aim of the destruction of the enemy. The Naval Staff in Whitehall could alone send wireless signals without

divulging to the enemy the location of some ship taking part in the hunt.

During the *Bismarck* operation the control was first vested in the Commander-in-Chief, then taken over by the Admiralty when the Commander-in-Chief could no longer afford to disclose his position by making signals, and then handed back to the Commander-in-Chief as soon as he decided that he could again break "wireless silence."

The results were historic. Never before had there been, over the whole period of a prolonged naval operation, such full and efficient co-operation by the Naval Staff at the Admiralty. Admiral Tovey, the Commander-in-Chief afloat, paid striking tribute to this in his official despatch. He said that the work of the Admiralty, in giving orders to outlying forces, and co-ordinating their movements to a common object, when he could no longer do this himself, was invaluable, and pointed out that the Admiralty's appreciations of the enemy's probable intentions and courses of action were invariably correct. Certainly there has been no other case in modern times of a Commander-in-Chief afloat being so outspoken in praise of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty. It must not be forgotten that Dudley Pound was the Chief of that Staff.

The necessity for Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound to accompany the Prime Minister on his visits to the United States and elsewhere has, of course, brought him into even closer contact with the international aspect of sea warfare. On those occasions he places his great experience unreservedly at the disposal of all, while always stressing the necessity for the strongest possible combination of force against the enemy.

Dudley Pound's chief recreations are shooting and fishing. During the shooting season he always tries to get at least half of Saturday off. If he succeeds, he always goes back to the Admiralty in the evening and works as usual after dinner. Seven days a year is the amount of leave which the First Sea Lord allows himself, but that, of course, depends on circumstances. Sir Dudley always tries to arrange to take his leave early in the shooting season, in which case he goes to Scotland. Last year he was in luck and was able to enjoy his whole leave of seven days, but the year before he was recalled to the Admiralty in the middle of his leave.

At the Admiralty he works a seventeen-hour day with, whenever possible, a short rest after lunch. He sleeps every night in Admiralty

House, where the First Lord has placed at his disposal a bedroom and a bathroom. He is called at eight, and after a shave and a bath and a glance through the *Daily Sketch*, which is his favourite newspaper and is delivered when he is called each morning, he goes to his office, getting there at about 9.30 a.m.

In his room at the Admiralty he at once settles down to look through all the signals which have come through during the night. Of course, if a signal is received which requires his immediate attention, he is called at once, whatever the hour.

Dudley Pound never has breakfast. His substitute is a cup of coffee which he has while going through the signals.

Between 9.30 and 10.30, too, he receives reports from the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff and from the Assistant Chiefs of the Naval Staff.

At 10.30 he leaves the Admiralty and goes to the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which is held every day and is attended by the professional heads of all the fighting services and the Chief of Combined Operations. This meeting usually lasts until 12.30, and sometimes goes on until 1.30.

On days when he is not attending official luncheons, he either lunches in his room at the Admiralty or at his club or goes home to his flat, depending upon the pressure of work. After lunch, if it is at all possible, he snatches a short nap in an armchair, but by 3.30 he is at work again, and from that time until 7.30 he is available to see people who have appointments with him. There may be Admiralty Staff Officers, senior representatives of other Government Departments, or senior officers of the British or Allied forces passing through London who wish to see him.

His relations with the Allies are close and cordial. When British decorations are awarded to officers and men of the Allied naval forces they are usually presented by the First Sea Lord in the Admiralty. The First Sea Lord always sees all Flag Officers and Captains returning from sea service abroad, thus ensuring that he is kept in close and continuous touch with the progress of the war at sea and with the current ideas and thoughts of the fleet.

During the course of the week the First Sea Lord attends a Cabinet meeting, a meeting of the Anti-U-boat Committee, and sometimes meetings of the Defence Committee and Admiralty Board Meetings. There are also Sea Lords' meetings and numerous *ad hoc* meetings with members of the Naval Staff.

Usually he goes out to dinner at about 7.30. Frequently he has to attend a meeting either inside or outside the Admiralty after dinner. Then he gets down to the paper work which has accumulated during the day, and also goes through papers concerning the meetings to be held on the following day. By the time all that is done it is usually between 2.30 and 3 a.m. Then the First Sea Lord goes to bed.

In his weighing of issues and in the decisions which he takes, Sir Dudley Pound is essentially sound. This is the quality in his steadfast character which is stressed over and over again by those who have worked close to him. When they hear him stumping along the Admiralty corridors with his "game" leg and his stick they recognise that there comes a wise counsellor and a man who can be relied upon. Sir Dudley Pound has a tremendous sense of loyalty and service. He is a man of strong convictions, and has never been afraid of being in a minority, but, then, he never thinks of himself.

As First Sea Lord it frequently devolves upon Dudley Pound to take decisions which may well alter the course of history.

When one looks back it seems at first sight that some of our problems might have been better handled in a different way, but close examination of such cases with due regard to all relevant facts show that the way in which they were handled at the time was not dictated solely by the requirements of naval strategy, but were the outcome of compromises with issues of high policy.

It must be remembered that, even in war, the Royal Navy is the servant of the State and an instrument of policy, not its master; and that the Naval Staff, although charged with the duty of advising against policy which is militarily unsound, is subordinate to the higher councils of State which decide the policy to be followed.

Inevitably, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound has his critics, as his predecessors in office have had, and as future First Sea Lords are bound to have. Suffice to say that the Navy does not share the criticism of Dudley Pound expressed in Parliament, often by retired naval officers who exchanged politics for the sea many years ago and are consequently not familiar with many of the factors which the First Sea Lord has to consider in framing strategy and tactics.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound has two sons, one of whom has earned the D.S.C. for service at sea in this war. Lieutenant

George Dudley Pound, R.N., was First Lieutenant of the destroyer *Lamerton* when she sank the Italian submarine *Ferraris* in the Atlantic in November, 1941, and took prisoner six officers and forty-six ratings. He was awarded the D.S.C. for "skill and enterprise" in this action.

His other son, Martin, is a major in the Royal Marines and is serving abroad with the corps. His daughter, Barbara, is now the wife of Lieutenant-Commander D. A. R. Duff, D.S.C., Royal Navy, who was Sir Dudley Pound's Flag Lieutenant when he was Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

SIR HENRY DANIEL PRIDHAM-WIPPELL

K.C.B., C.V.O.

Vice-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR HENRY PRIDHAM-WIPPELL is the "keeper of the Gate" of England. In other, and more official words, he is the Vice-Admiral Commanding at Dover. He took over that command on August 1st, 1942.

From one of the old gun casemates, hollowed out of the white cliff by prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars, and now forming a tiny balcony like the stern-walk of a flagship, the "Vice-Admiral, Dover" looks out from what was considered the "invasion coast" of Britain to the invasion coast of Europe. The narrow moat between those coasts, spanned by aircraft in minutes and by shells in seconds, is his province and responsibility, as are the northern and western approaches to the narrow straits.

Things are apt to happen quickly at Dover, and everybody from the Vice-Admiral down to the newest-joined seaman has to be continually "on his toes." That little balcony is just outside the Admiral's office, cut out of the solid chalk. On it are mounted high-powered binoculars, through which details of the French coast can be easily seen on a clear day, and ready loaded Lewis guns—symbolic of the instant readiness essential in the Dover Command.

The Dover Command is a perpetual battle of wits against a close and watchful enemy, with both sides provided with the latest secret devices and weapons for each other's discomfiture. These are by no means solely naval, and hence one finds at Dover the three fighting services working in very close unison. In the ancient rock-hewn spaces deeper into the cliff than Admiral Pridham-Wippell's office is the naval "operations room." An entire wall is taken up by a large-scale chart of the Straits of Dover and their approaches. On this are plotted practically from minute to minute every movement of sea or aircraft in the area. Attached to the naval staff is an Air Liaison Officer. He can communicate direct in a matter of seconds with the air bases from which operate the fighters and fighter-bombers of the Royal Air Force and the torpedo-carrying aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm.

Next door to the naval plotting room, and opening out of it, is the military plotting room used by the officers controlling the shore batteries. Here all the relevant information contained on the naval plot appears on a large and curiously shaped table, its surface covered by a map of the area divided into thousands of numbered squares. From here the guns are controlled when they are firing at any target presented by the enemy, and here the actual positions of the falling shells are plotted.

Dover's chief preoccupation has been for some time preventing the enemy from running convoys or single ships through the straits. Any such ships nowadays attempt the voyage only in short dashes between adjacent ports. Even so, they hug the European shore and pass well within the enemy's minefields. Time is therefore the vital factor in catching them at sea and destroying them.

To pass through the straits enemy shipping has to traverse a sector off Cape Gris Nez where it can be engaged by the British coastal batteries. The enemy can also be attacked by our light coastal forces or fighter-bombers or torpedo-bombers.

The Royal Air Force also plays a most important part in closing the straits to enemy traffic. Not only does it carry out frequent attacks on enemy shipping in the northern and western approaches to the straits, but it keeps a constant watch on the ports of France and Belgium, noting all movements so that an attempt by the enemy to run a ship or convoy through the straits can be anticipated.

Another most important part of the duties of the Vice-Admiral at Dover is the operation of the air-sea-rescue service for picking up pilots and air crews who have baled out over the Straits of Dover and their approaches. Some of the air-sea-rescue craft are owned and manned by the Royal Air Force and some by the Royal Navy, but all, in the Dover Command, are operated by Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell. The importance of this work is shown by the fact that up to the end of the first week of June, 1943, two hundred and fifty-six British airmen and fifty-seven German airmen had been saved in this way. It is now possible to say that, in the Dover Command area a pilot who bales out over the sea has a chance of rescue which amounts to virtual certainty provided he is alive on reaching the water and not too badly wounded to be able to keep himself afloat for a short time.

Apart from attempts to stop enemy traffic, there is the necessity for passing our own ships and convoys through the straits. There

is constant minesweeping to be done; enemy minelaying expeditions to be intercepted and broken up; our own minelaying sorties to be arranged and carried out. One can well imagine that Pridham-Wippell as Vice-Admiral, Dover, does not have much time to spare.

Before taking over the Dover Command Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell served in the Mediterranean for two years from the entry of the Italians into the war. Here he had a gruelling time, during which he showed the Italians how cruisers could and should be used, just as Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham showed them the futility of building powerful battleships when they did not know how to use them.

From May to October, 1940, Pridham-Wippell was the Rear-Admiral, First Battle Squadron, flying his flag first in the *Royal Sovereign* and afterwards in the *Malaya*. In the *Royal Sovereign* he was present at the Battle of Calabria and in both ships took part in the passing of a number of convoys to and from Malta in the face of threats from the Italian Fleet and almost continuous bombing by the Regia Aeronautica. Lacking fighter cover and present-day equipment it is a marvel how few casualties were sustained in these early operations.

In October, 1940, Pridham-Wippell took over the post of Vice-Admiral Commanding the Light Forces and Second in Command of the Mediterranean Fleet from Vice-Admiral Tovey.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell was therefore Second in Command of the Mediterranean Fleet at the time of the epic Fleet Air Arm attack on the Italian battle fleet at Taranto on November 11th, 1940, which cut Mussolini's capital ship strength in half.

Pridham-Wippell played his part in this operation, not at Taranto, but in carrying out one of the most daring raids into waters which the enemy then considered to be inviolable. The Mediterranean had been long boasted of by Mussolini as *mare nostrum*. He would have had some reason to give such a name to the Adriatic, with both sides of its narrow entrance through the Straits of Otranto in his hands. Of the possibilities of closing these straits, both the British and Italian navies had had ample experience in the last war.

Pridham-Wippell was the first commander of British surface ships to demonstrate that even the Adriatic could not be regarded as an Italian lake.

It was all part of the same operation which wreaked havoc at

Taranto. The whole Mediterranean Fleet had sailed from Alexandria to cover the passage of a convoy to Malta. Taranto was the result of the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* being detached from the fleet during this operation. Shortly before the *Illustrious* left the fleet and headed north for Taranto the Seventh Cruiser Squadron and two destroyers, under the command of Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, were detached to the northward to raid in, and through, the Straits of Otranto leading into the Adriatic.

The moment for such a raid was well chosen. Italy had declared war on Greece a fortnight before, and great numbers of men and vast quantities of military supplies were being shipped by the Italians across the Adriatic, chiefly from Brindisi to Valona, in Albania.

That night the cruisers *Orion*, *Sydney* and *Ajax* (the *Orion* wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell) and the destroyers *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, steamed into the Straits of Otranto at slow speed so that their bow-waves and wakes would not be unduly conspicuous. It was a night of bright moonlight, such as the enemy might well deem too hazardous for such an operation.

In the Straits of Otranto Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's force sighted a convoy of four troopships or supply ships, escorted by a destroyer and a torpedo boat. They were heading for Brindisi, obviously from Valona or one of the other Albanian ports. Pridham-Wippell would have preferred a convoy heading the other way, but he had no choice. He stalked the enemy and got into close range. At 1.25 a.m. on November 12th the British cruisers and the *Nubian* opened fire on the four ships in convoy, while the *Mohawk* engaged the torpedo boat. The Italian destroyer was on the disengaged side of the convoy and could not therefore be at once fired upon.

Complete surprise was achieved. In a very few minutes one of the supply ships or transports had been sunk and two of the others had been set on fire and were in a sinking condition. The remaining ship of the convoy succeeded in making good her escape under cover of smoke, while the escort, apparently considering that the claims of self-preservation outweighed the claims of the convoy to their protection, used their speed and heavy smoke-screens to get away. The contrast between this and the action of the *Fervis Bay* in tackling hopeless odds in the Atlantic only a few days before so that the ships of her convoy might have a chance, is inescapable.

Pridham-Wippell and his ships had not only created a diversion

ensuring the attack on Taranto, they had shown the Italian High Command that even their short sea route across the southern Adriatic was vulnerable to the British Navy. In doing so they not only inflicted loss upon the enemy, but caused him to take precautions which taxed his resources and undoubtedly led to a reduction in the rate at which troops and supplies were being rushed to the Greek front. It must not be forgotten in this connection that Italian inability to deal single-handed with the Greeks forced Germany to direct large forces to that theatre of war.

The Seventh Cruiser Squadron and the two destroyers rejoined the fleet shortly before noon the following day. They were greeted by a signal from Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief, to Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, who is a keen golfer, which ran: "C.-in-C. to V.A.L.F.—I trust you had many opportunities of using your heavy mashie." To this Pridham-Wippell, with the escaped merchant ship rankling in his mind, replied: "V.A.L.F. to C.-in-C.—Yes, but I am afraid I missed one putt."

The crippling of the Italian battle fleet at Taranto naturally gave the British Mediterranean Fleet far greater freedom of movement in the Eastern Mediterranean. This freedom was used to supply and reinforce Malta and to succour our Greek allies. These were not helped only by a flow to their country of seaborne supplies, equipment and troops. The Royal Navy also took the offensive against the reinforcements and supplies sent from Italy to the Greek front.

So it was that Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, still flying his flag in the light cruiser *Orion*, again led the way into the Straits of Otranto on the night of December 18th, 1940—another calm and moonlit night. This time, however, he was the advance guard of a force which included ships bigger than cruisers. Astern of his cruiser squadron steamed the battleships *Warspite* and *Valiant*, the former wearing the flag of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief.

To take an entire fleet, including battleships, through heavily mined and closely patrolled straits, both sides of which are in enemy hands, and to do this on a clear night of brilliant moonlight, was an extremely daring operation, but Sir Andrew Cunningham and his Second-in-Command specialised in daring enterprises and found in them a potent weapon against the enemy.

That night Valona, the chief port of disembarkation on the Albanian coast for Italian reinforcements and supplies, woke up to

the crash of 15-inch shells. The battleships fired over a hundred of these great shells into the docks and harbour works of Valona, doing great damage.

Meanwhile Pridham-Wippell led his cruisers and some destroyers on up the Adriatic. They swept on, past the Bari-Durazzo line, then turned and swept back, but no sign of an enemy did they see. It was a disappointment, but it was not without satisfactory significance. The enemy was apparently not risking the passage by night, when raiding forces might appear. This in itself must cause a considerable slowing down of the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the Greek front—a flow which would now be further interrupted by the results of the bombardment of Valona.

Having achieved its object inside Mussolini's "back door," the fleet withdrew "without further incident."

On March 27th, 1941, Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell, who was then in Greek waters, received orders to join the Commander-in-Chief next morning in a position south of Gavdhos Island, south of Crete. It was the prelude to the Battle of Matapan.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's flag flew in the 6-inch gun cruiser *Orion*. He had with him three other 6-inch gun cruisers, the *Ajax*, *Gloucester* and *Perth* of the Royal Australian Navy; and the four destroyers *Ilex*, *Hasty*, *Hereward* and *Vendetta*. The latter was also a Royal Australian ship.

Soon after dawn on March 28th an aircraft from H.M.S. *Formidable* on reconnaissance sighted and reported an enemy force consisting of three cruisers and four destroyers, south of Gavdhos Island and steering to the south-west. Pridham-Wippell's force was about forty miles farther to the southward, and he at once turned north to make contact with the enemy.

The Second-in-Command sighted the enemy force at 7.45 a.m. They were a long way off, but he strongly suspected that they were 8-inch gun ships, and could therefore outrange his ships. Moreover, the Italians had superior speed. He accordingly turned his ships to the south-eastward, giving the enemy the impression that the encounter had been a chance one and that he was seeking safety in flight, although in reality he was leading the enemy towards the Commander-in-Chief, who was then about ninety-five miles away to the south-east.

Within four minutes another aircraft reconnaissance report confirmed that Pridham-Wippell's decision had been the right one.

This report was of the sighting of a Littorio class battleship—it proved to be the Italian flagship *Vittorio Veneto*—six cruisers, and seven destroyers. The whole of this enemy force was steering south-east. Soon afterwards it was reported that this force had been joined by at least two more cruisers and two more destroyers.

For an hour and ten minutes Pridham-Wippell led the three Italian cruisers and their accompanying destroyers towards the Commander-in-Chief. During the last three-quarters of an hour of this phase of the action both sides opened fire intermittently, but the British ships kept out of range of the enemy's heavier metal (it has been confirmed that the Italian cruisers were 8-inch gun ships), and the salvoes on both sides fell short.

At 8.55 a.m., however, the Italian cruisers reversed their tactics and turned away to the north-westward. One of them had been seen to catapult an aircraft, and it was probably some report from this aircraft which led the Italian Admiral to give up the "pursuit" of the British cruisers and fall back on his main fleet.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell also turned his cruisers to the north-west, so that the positions of the forces was completely reversed. Instead of the Italians following the British ships to the south-east, the British ships were following the Italians to the north-west. The decision of the Second-in-Command to turn after the Italian cruisers was dictated by the fact that his squadron was the only surface unit in contact with the enemy. As such, it was his first duty to remain in contact with the enemy and to continue to report the enemy's position and movements to the Commander-in-Chief.

This phase of the action lasted until 10.58 a.m. At that moment Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell sighted the Italian flagship *Vittorio Veneto*. This ship at once opened a heavy and accurate fire from her 15-inch guns on the British cruisers. The range was sixteen miles and the British 6-inch gun cruisers could not hope to hit back. Pridham-Wippell was momentarily in a dangerously uncomfortable position. His ships, as he turned again to the south-east, were being subjected to accurate 15-inch gunfire from one quarter, while enemy 8-inch gun cruisers were on his other quarter. Both the enemy forces had the range of him, and the cruisers had an advantage in speed. Had any of his ships been "winged" they would have had no chance to escape destruction.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell at once turned his ships away

to the south-east under cover of smoke, and to his relief the Italian battleship ceased firing. The reason for this was not then obvious, since Pridham-Wippell's view of the enemy was obscured by smoke. It was, in fact, due to the attack by the striking force from H.M.S. *Formidable*, which developed at that timely moment and led to the *Vittorio Veneto* breaking off the action with our cruisers and turning away with her speed reduced as a result of one torpedo hit.

The Second-in-Command, having then lost touch with the enemy, hauled away to the south-east and rejoined the Commander-in-Chief.

During the day further torpedo attacks were delivered by naval aircraft. At four o'clock in the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief received a report that the *Vittorio Veneto's* speed had been reduced as a result of these attacks to the neighbourhood of 13 knots. Sir Andrew Cunningham was then some sixty miles to the south-east of the Italian flagship, and it was clear to him that, even with the *Vittorio Veneto's* speed so reduced, he could not come up with her before nightfall. He therefore ordered his Second-in-Command to press on at full speed with his cruisers and destroyers to regain touch with the enemy and deliver torpedo attacks at dusk.

It was nearly dark when Pridham-Wippell saw the sky ahead lit up by flying tracers and bursting shells. This was the Italian fleet's reaction to the last of the Fleet Air Arm's torpedo attacks. Pridham-Wippell commented in his despatch that the naval air crews "must have been very gallant men who went through it to get their torpedoes home."

As the firing died away Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's ships were steaming all out to regain contact with the enemy. Soon after dark a large vessel was detected by the *Orion*, but as it was stopped Pridham-Wippell pushed on after the main enemy fleet, leaving the derelict, which afterwards proved to be the *Pola*, to the battleships following astern. For once, however, the Italians stole a tactical advantage.

After the attack by the Fleet Air Arm and as soon as darkness fell, the Italian Commander-in-Chief had made a large alteration of course to the southward. Unaware of this and in an endeavour to get between the Italians and their bases, the British cruisers held on to the north-westward and overran the enemy in the night, never making contact with him. Consequently Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's force took no part in the subsequent night

action in which the battleships under the Commander-in-Chief sank the enemy 8-inch gun cruisers *Pola*, *Zara* and *Fiume* without themselves so much as suffering a scratch on their paint.

For several months past Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's light forces had been largely employed in carrying and conveying the British Expeditionary Force to Greece—without the loss of a single man. Now there followed the German intervention in Greece and the extrication of our troops from that country. The Commander-in-Chief placed Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell in charge of the evacuation. Over a period of six days, the light forces and the Merchant Navy embarked 56,000 of the Army from beaches on the east and south coasts in the face of determined attacks by the Luftwaffe (who by that time had no opposition in the air), and of the threat of the superior Italian Fleet in the Ionian Sea.

This successfully accomplished, Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell returned to Alexandria and shortly afterwards transferred his flag to H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* as Vice-Admiral Commanding First Battle Squadron and Second-in-Command of the Mediterranean Fleet. His first task in his new command was the covering of the smaller ships assisting in the defence of Crete, and later the evacuation of that island. The battleships, keeping guard to the westward to prevent any interference by the Italian Fleet, were targets for the enemy air forces operating from both Greece and Cyrenaica. The aircraft carrier *Formidable* was badly damaged in a savage attack by a large number of dive-bombers; the *Barham* was hit; and several destroyers were put out of action.

These were dark pages in the history of the war, but they were illumined by much heroism, and above all by the devotion of the officers and men of the Royal Navy to their duty and to the Army under the most exacting and dangerous conditions.

On 3rd June, 1941, the *London Gazette* announced that Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell had been created a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath "for gallantry and distinguished service in the withdrawal of troops from Greece." Seldom can official language have been more stilted.

During the summer of 1941 there was a lull in naval operations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The losses incurred in the evacuation of Greece and Crete forced this upon us, but still the fleet sailed into the Central Mediterranean at frequent intervals, trailing its coat in invitation to the Italians.

With the approach of the offensive in the Western Desert in November, 1941, the fleet set out to intercept and prevent supplies reaching Rommel's forces in Libya. On 25th November, 1941, the *Barham*, wearing Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell's flag, was hit by four torpedoes fired from a German U-boat. This blow was too much for the grand old ship—a hero of Jutland and twice damaged in this war—and in four minutes she was gone. Of her crew of 1100, 300 were saved and amongst them Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell. After nearly two hours in the water and soaked in oil fuel, he was rescued by the destroyer *Hotspur*.

After a short spell he hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *Valiant* until March, 1942, when he relieved Sir Andrew Cunningham temporarily as Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, which post he held until the arrival of Admiral Sir Henry Harwood in May, 1942, when he returned to England.

Vice-Admiral Pridham-Wippell was born on August 12th, 1885, at Bromley, Kent, and entered the Royal Navy in May, 1900. As a Lieutenant at the beginning of the last war, he was recommended for good work when the new battleship *Audacious* was sunk by a mine on October 27th, 1914. In 1915, as a Lieutenant-Commander, he commanded destroyers in the Mediterranean, being present at the later stages of the Gallipoli campaign and subsequently operating in the Adriatic based on Brindisi. There is irony in the fact that during this stage in his career Pridham-Wippell was awarded the Italian Silver Medal for Military Valour.

During the naval operations off the Palestine coast in support of General Allenby's advance in 1917, Pridham-Wippell earned the Order of the Nile, fourth class. He also had a narrow escape from being torpedoed. He was commanding the destroyer *Comet*, which was at anchor at Deir-el-Belah when the German submarine UC 38 penetrated the somewhat sketchy harbour defences. The commander of UC 38 had a look at the *Comet* through his periscope, but selected another destroyer, the *Staunch*, and a monitor as the targets for his torpedoes. He torpedoed and sank both these ships, but did not attack the *Comet*.

After the last war Pridham-Wippell spent two years as a Commander in the Operations Division of the Naval Staff. He was promoted to the rank of Captain at the end of 1926, and, after undergoing courses, he took command in 1928 of the cruiser *Enterprise* on the East Indies Station.



Vice-Admiral Sir H. D. Pridham-Wippell

This ship was cruising in the Indian Ocean when Captain Pridham-Wippell suddenly got orders to proceed to Dar-es-Salaam "with despatch." The illness of King George V. had taken a turn for the worse and necessitated the presence in England at the earliest possible moment of the Prince of Wales, who was on a big game shooting expedition in East Africa. The Prince of Wales embarked in H.M.S. *Enterprise* at Dar-es-Salaam and the cruiser, although she had to run through a gale in the Eastern Mediterranean, made a record voyage from that port to Brindisi, 4071 miles in 8 days 1 hour. For this service Captain Pridham-Wippell was made a Companion of the Royal Victorian Order.

On leaving the *Enterprise* in 1930, Pridham-Wippell commanded the destroyer flotilla leader *Campbell* and then returned for two years to the Operations Division of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, this time as Director of the Division.

In 1936 Pridham-Wippell was appointed Commodore commanding the destroyer flotillas of the Home Fleet, a post which he held for two years and in which he gained much valuable experience which he was to put to such good use when commanding the light forces of the Mediterranean Fleet in action against the enemy.

The times were far from peaceful. The Destroyer Command was fully occupied with the Spanish Civil War, evacuating refugees and guarding British interests. In the autumn of 1937 under the Nyon Agreement, constant patrols were maintained against submarines which were interfering with merchant ships in the Western Mediterranean. These patrols were the responsibility, to a great degree, of Commodore Pridham-Wippell.

During this time his broad pendant flew first in the light cruiser *Cairo* and then in the new 6-inch gun cruiser *Aurora*, a ship which, like the Commodore whose broad pendant she wore, was to distinguish herself in war in the Mediterranean.

Pridham-Wippell was promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in January, 1938. Shortly afterwards he became Director of Personal Services at the Admiralty. As such he became responsible for the manning of the Navy and for the welfare of the men. The Director of Personal Services is a sort of "universal aunt" to the whole of the Lower Deck, and as such the morale, contentment and spirit of the men who man the fleet depend upon him to a very great extent.

Pridham-Wippell held the post of Director of Personal Services

until 1940—that is, through two of the most difficult years for anybody who has ever held that post. He had to face all manner of problems during the period of expansion of the naval personnel immediately before the war, when the manning difficulties consequent upon years of retrenchment were being met by national conscription and the re-employment of pensioners, each of them affecting widely differing age groups and each giving rise to separate problems.

In September, 1938, came general mobilisation; a few weeks later demobilisation; and in August, 1939, general mobilisation again—a record for one term of office for a Director of Personal Services.

With mobilisation came added problems for the Director of Personal Services, particularly as regards the manifold issues concerning the welfare of the men. Canteens, mails, libraries, games, newspapers, films—all sorts of things had to be arranged, and arranged so that they reached ships which were moving in secret. Pridham-Wippell, however, appeared to have time for everything. He was one of the originators of the Royal Naval Film Corporation, which supplies projectors and films to ships of the Royal Navy, and he was the creator of the widespread system of "Port Amenities Officers," who are responsible that the men of the navy are looked after, not only at the naval ports which most of the older hands know so well, but at all the little ports from which convoy escorts, minesweepers, patrol craft and the like work in time of war.

The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, the most discerning body of men in the world, will tell you that Pridham-Wippell was a superlatively good "D.P.S." He most richly deserved the C.B. which was awarded to him while he held that post.

Pridham-Wippell is a very quiet man, with a puckish sense of humour. He has shown himself a doughty fighter and a most efficient officer both at sea and in administrative posts ashore, but one has only to meet him to realise that the predominant characteristics of the man—and they show in his face—are kindness and understanding.

GEORGE WALTER GILLOW SIMPSON

C.B.E.

Captain, Royal Navy

CAPTAIN G. W. G. SIMPSON is small of stature, a fact which has earned him the nickname of "Shrimp," by which he is always known.

"Shrimp" Simpson's home has always been within twenty miles of Guildford, in the county of Surrey. So far as he can make out, no former member of his family, either on the paternal or the distaff side, has ever had anything to do with the sea, much less the Royal Navy. On his father's side he comes from three consecutive generations of country parsons. Yet at the age of fourteen "Shrimp" put on naval uniform. Nor was he content with merely "going to sea"—he must needs go under the sea, and it is as a submarine officer that he has made for himself a distinguished career.

After two years and nine months as a cadet, first at Osborne and then at Dartmouth, "Shrimp" went to the Grand Fleet as a midshipman in September, 1917. For the rest of the 1914-1918 war he served in that fleet, being successively appointed to H.M.S. *Superb*, H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, and H.M.S. *Benbow*, and very dull he found it. During the whole of that time the ships were employed in covering the passages of the convoys to and from Scandinavia, and never once did they catch a glimpse of the enemy.

"Shrimp," however, was learning his trade as a naval officer, and learning it fast in a hard and uncomfortable school. A junior "snotty" had to learn to stand up for himself; "Shrimp" soon showed his messmates that he was tough and a fighter despite his size and his nickname.

Early in 1919 Simpson, still a midshipman, joined the destroyer H.M.S. *Whitley*. That autumn he saw active service in the Baltic during that curious phase when British naval forces under the command of Admiral Sir Walter Cowan were co-operating with the military forces of Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia against the

forces of von der Goltz, the object of the Allies being to secure the independence of the Baltic States.

After some months in the Baltic, Simpson went back to H.M.S. *Benbow* and saw service in support of the White Russian General Wrangel in the Black Sea, and then in the Sea of Marmora during the time when the Turks, under Kemal Pasha (afterwards Kemal Ataturk), were beginning to feel new-found strength and resent the presence of the Greeks in Asia Minor.

Thus Simpson found himself switched from one confusing front of the still simmering cauldron of Europe to another. There was, however, a similarity between these two fronts. They were both intimately concerned with Russian problems. And in both were inextricably mixed international diplomacy and abstruse local politics. They provided endless cases in which naval officers had to take decisions which would have taxed the tact and knowledge of ambassadors and international jurists; and they gave all concerned much food for thought.

In this forcing house, Simpson began to think about the problems of Russia, particularly as they affected the Baltic and the Near East. It is a study which he has kept up ever since, despite his many other activities in peace and war. As a "snotty" he learnt a few words of Russian. Eight years later, in October, 1928, he began to study the language in earnest, first for four months at London University, and then for seven months in Tallinn, Esthonia. In October, 1929, he passed his examinations and his name appeared in the Navy List among the Royal Navy's comparatively few interpreters in Russian.

In the summer of 1921 "Shrimp" Simpson shipped the single ring of gold lace and joined the light cruiser *Carysfort* (Captain A. F. B. Carpenter) as Acting Sub-Lieutenant. A few months later, in October, 1921, he joined submarines.

After his qualifying courses Simpson had for a time such dull jobs as looking after submarines which were laid up in "reserve groups." These proved to be, in most cases, only a halt on the last voyage of the submarines to the scrapping yards. The task of looking after them was neither interesting nor inspiring.

Then, at last, in the spring of 1923, he was posted to a sea-going submarine flotilla. This was the Fourth Submarine Flotilla in China. On the China Station Simpson served first as "Third Hand" of L.15, and later as First Lieutenant of L.7.

When his time was up on the China Station Simpson was lucky

enough to be able to arrange to return to England by the Trans-Siberian Railway, and thus see again something of the great country whose problems and language had so intrigued him when he had been a midshipman in the Baltic and the Near East.

Simpson arrived in England in March, 1926, and went on foreign service leave. He still had a year to do as First Lieutenant of a submarine before he could get his first command, and this he put in in L.18, in the First Submarine Flotilla with the Mediterranean Fleet. On December 15th, 1927, Lieutenant G. W. G. Simpson took over his first command—H.M. Submarine H.49, stationed at Portland.

After a year in command of H.49, and one year studying Russian, Simpson was due for "big ship time" under the inexorable rule that all submarine officers must do at least two years in a large surface ship after their first period in command of a submarine.

Simpson accordingly joined H.M.S. *Nelson*, flagship of the Home Fleet. It was something of a feather in his cap, solely due to his own efficiency as an officer. Hundreds of submarine officers had gone to big ships to "do their time," and in so doing they had shown the senior officers in the fleet that they were of the very highest standard in leadership, initiative and reliability. The result had been a great change of heart among the Captains and Commanders in the big ships. Where they had once rather dreaded the appointment of a "sub-mariner," since they always associated them with dirty and ragged suits, they now competed for the appointment of officers recommended by the submarine staff at Fort Blockhouse.

In the two years in which Simpson served in H.M.S. *Nelson*, that ship wore the flag of three Commanders-in-Chief: Vice-Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield; Admiral Sir Michael Hodges; and Admiral Sir John Kelly.

Simpson returned to submarines in January, 1932. His appointment was not in command, but it was one of great importance. He was to be First Lieutenant of H.M.S. *Thames*, then building at Barrow-in-Furness.

The *Thames* was the first submarine of a new class. She was a large ship, displacing 1850 tons on the surface and 2723 tons when submerged, and was designed for a much higher speed than any former diesel-driven submarine, except the experimental XI, which never attained her designed speed.

The *Thames* was commanded by Commander C. B. Barry, D.S.O.,

who is now, as a Rear-Admiral, in command of the Submarine Service. The new submarine proved an unqualified success and did everything that could be expected of her, both on her trials and at sea. She had, in fact, what Simpson describes as a "particularly happy and successful maiden commission." Even after her trials, she was used to carry out many experimental cruises. She was the first British submarine to operate in the Arctic, and the successes achieved by British submarines in those waters in this war have owed a good deal to the experience gained by the *Thames*. On another occasion during her maiden commission the *Thames* "steamed" non-stop from England to Venice, at what was then a record speed for a diesel-driven submarine on a long voyage. Later she was to travel round the African continent and investigate possible enemy raider bases in the Southern Ocean.

From the *Thames* Simpson went to the Staff College, and then back to Fort Blockhouse, where he instructed the Estonian naval mission in submarine work. Then, in April, 1935, he assumed command of L.27. War clouds were then gathered in the Near East as a result of Italian designs on Abyssinia, and when Italy invaded that country L.27 was one of a flotilla of submarines sent to Aden, where life was uneventful and far from comfortable.

"Shrimp" Simpson was promoted to Commander on the last day of 1935. Four months later he returned to England and went through the Tactical Course at Portsmouth. He then went to the Admiralty, where he was in the Operations Division of the Naval Staff for two years. They were interesting and instructive years at the Admiralty. Naval expansion was at last beginning to get under way in earnest, and the Operations Staff, moreover, had their hands full with the manifold problems raised by the Spanish Civil War.

In August, 1938, Simpson took command of the big minelaying submarine *Porpoise* in the Second Submarine Flotilla, Home Fleet. As such he was the senior submarine commanding officer of the Home and Mediterranean Fleets during the big combined fleet manoeuvres in the spring of 1939, and gained much useful experience in the handling of submarines in complicated strategic and tactical situations in which large fleets were involved.

In August, 1939, Simpson was at sea in the *Porpoise* carrying out exercises with the Home Fleet in the North Sea, when he was ordered to proceed to Malta "with despatch." The big minelaying

submarines were much in demand as war became more and more inevitable.

H.M.S. *Porpoise* arrived at Malta on September 1st—the day the German armies crossed the frontier of Poland. She operated from Malta for six weeks, and was then ordered home again. It was a very different Malta to which Simpson said farewell in mid-October, 1939, to the beleaguered fortress which he was to know so well a little more than a year later.

On her arrival in England the *Porpoise* had to refit. Simpson left her and went to Harwich as Second-in-Command of the Third Submarine Flotilla under Captain Philip Ruck-Keene. He was at Harwich in this capacity when the sirens of every ship in the harbour sounded in welcome to H.M. Submarine *Salmon* (Lieutenant-Commander E. O. Bickford) on her return from that famous patrol in which she sank a U-boat, intercepted the liner *Bremen*, and torpedoed at least one German cruiser.

Then, in the spring of 1940, began the chain of events which were to change completely the whole strategic set-up of the war at sea—the German invasion of Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries, the collapse of France, the entry of Italy into the war. Emergency measures had to be taken everywhere. It was only with one small part of these that Simpson had to deal, but, like so many of them, it was a case of improvisation. Moreover, it provided experience which was to prove valuable later, when he had to be continually improvising in face of the heaviest and most sustained air attacks the world has seen.

In the first half of May, 1940, it was clear that events on the continent had produced a situation in which large-scale air attacks might be expected on the British east coast bases. With this possibility in mind it was decided that the Third Submarine Flotilla should leave Harwich. Our submarine losses in the Norwegian campaign had been heavy, and we certainly could not afford, in face of our greatly increased commitments in the changed strategic situation, to risk loss or damage to modern submarines in harbour by enemy air attack.

On May 16th, 1940, therefore, the Third Submarine Flotilla sailed from Harwich. Simpson, however, remained at Harwich with a skeleton organisation for the maintenance and operation of the small old submarines of the H class. The danger of invasion was growing week by week, and it was decided that the H class

submarines should be based on Harwich and maintain patrols off the Dutch coast. With no depot ship at Harwich, the whole organisation had to be improvised.

Simpson operated the H class submarines from Harwich until the third week in September, by which time the R.A.F. had defeated the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain and the spectre of invasion was beginning to recede. Then he went back to Malta.

On January 8th, 1941, "Shrimp" Simpson arrived in Malta to take command of the submarines which were to operate from there. There was then a small number of modern submarines, chiefly of the Unity class, based on Malta. These were formed into the Tenth Submarine Flotilla, which was soon reinforced and became the most famous submarine flotilla in our naval history. The Unity class submarines were small. They had been specifically built for work in the North Sea and coastal operations and were not of great speed or endurance. They proved themselves, however, admirably suited to the conditions in the Central Mediterranean.

These were extremely difficult for submarines. The water was clear, and usually calm, so that a submarine could be seen from the air even when submerged to a considerable depth. The enemy had ample forces to keep a fairly constant sea and air patrol, and to sail his shipping in small convoys with numerous escorts. The areas of operation were too small to allow a submarine to make any great change in her patrol in the event of her position being compromised by carrying out an attack or through being sighted, and these areas were still further restricted by the extensive mining of the Central Mediterranean waters.

The tactical problems of our submarines were great, and they tended to increase. The enemy had to run his convoys a mere 200 to 400 miles from their main ports to Tripoli. After the fall of Tripoli they had to travel only 100 miles from West Sicily to Tunis or Bizerta. The enemy convoys varied from single ships up to eight or ten. The average was four, and an average escort would be three or four destroyers, possibly an armed auxiliary, and usually two to four aircraft overhead. Our submarines had continually to patrol in restricted waters where the enemy's surface forces were in command of the sea. It was seldom indeed that a submarine obtained a success without immediate and heavy retaliation with bombs and depth charges.

To quote Simpson's own words: "I am not exaggerating when

I say that for our submarines to patrol between Palermo and Bizerta is comparable to U-boats patrolling between Holyhead and Dublin—a feat which the U-boats have not attempted since the early part of the war.”

On the other hand, a submarine flotilla working from Malta is about the only naval situation in this war where geography is in our favour. A two-hundred mile circle round Malta embraces the Straits of Messina, the Sicilian Channel, and Tripoli—the three great focal points of the sea traffic between Italy and the Axis armies then in Libya. Shipping loaded at the Italian west coast ports—for all the railways from Italy’s industrial areas and from Germany run down the west coast—had to pass either through the Straits of Messina or the Sicilian Channel in order to reach the Libyan ports.

Simpson had called on the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, on his way to Malta. “Your object,” Cunningham had said, “is to prevent Axis shipping from reaching Tripoli.” It was a very clear-cut order, and the Commander-in-Chief was content to leave the manner of its execution to the man who was going to command the Malta Submarine Flotilla.

From the outset, Simpson found himself up against difficulties. His arrival in Malta coincided almost exactly with the arrival of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean to reinforce the Regia Aeronautica. On the very day after he arrived in Malta the aircraft carrier *Illustrious* was badly damaged by Stukas while escorting a convoy to Malta. On fire, and steering only by her engines, the *Illustrious* succeeded in reaching Malta to effect temporary repairs. The Luftwaffe, determined to achieve the final destruction of the great aircraft carrier, delivered a succession of very heavy raids on the harbour area of Malta. They failed to prevent the *Illustrious* being temporarily repaired and sailing under her own steam, but they made no easier the task of organising an operational submarine flotilla.

The submarine base was established on a small promontory and, in the first instance, the submarine crews were housed, when not at sea, in quarters which had been built over two centuries before for the reception of passengers from ships which had not been granted “pratique” by the quarantine authorities. The soft limestone walls were covered with names, carved by generations of passengers in their boredom. Among the names was that of Lord

Byron. The civil authorities, in making the buildings available as a submarine base, were insistent that adequate steps should be taken to preserve these historic relics, and to dissuade bored submarine sailors from adding their names to those of past inmates. Simpson gave the authorities their guarantee and took precautions, only to see the whole building demolished by bombs from the vandal Hun aircraft.

During the two years that "Shrimp" Simpson commanded the Tenth Submarine Flotilla at Malta air raids averaged over 260 a month—that is, between eight and nine a day. On one day there were no less than seventeen air raid alerts; on another the island was under "alert" conditions for twenty-one hours out of the twenty-four; on one occasion it was estimated that the enemy had 450 bombers and 300 fighters over the island at one time; in one period of eighteen days there were 170 hours of air raid alerts.

During the first four months of Simpson's command of the Tenth Submarine Flotilla the Luftwaffe first of all carried out very heavy raids on the harbour area. Then it devoted most of its strength to intensive minelaying from the air, while trying at the same time to neutralise the island's airfields with bombs. The mining caused as much anxiety as the "blitzes" on the harbour area, for most of the minesweepers had been sunk or damaged, and the problem of getting the submarines in and out of the harbour was most difficult and delicate, particularly since the enemy was using magnetic and acoustic mines.

The operations of the flotilla, however, were never interrupted. The submarines drew first blood before January was out, and since that time they took so great and regular a toll of Axis shipping that the public came to regard their periodic announcement by the Admiralty almost as a matter of course.

When he first got to Malta Simpson placed his submarines near the straits east and west of Sicily and near the approaches to Tripoli or some other main port. In the meantime, he made a careful study of the habits of the Axis in running the convoys across to Africa, piecing together reports by submarines and aircraft and every other available scrap of information. In this work his experience in submarines during large-scale manoeuvres in peace time, and his training at the Staff College and the Tactical School, stood him in good stead. Very soon he became adept at foreseeing the enemy's moves, and many is the submarine commanding officer

who avers that he would have achieved no success had it not been for the almost uncanny way in which "Shrimp" put him in the right place at the critical moment.

Successes were so great that, when he left Malta two years and one month after his arrival, the Tenth Submarine Flotilla had sunk over half a million tons of Axis shipping, most of which was laden with reinforcements and supplies for Rommel's armies, and which included some crowded troopships of well over 20,000 tons.

Simpson stuck closely to his orders from Admiral Cunningham, which indicated beyond doubt that the chief objective of the submarines was to be supply ships taking reinforcements of men and material to the enemy's armies in Libya. The placing of the submarines for the primary duty, however, gave them several opportunities for attacking units of the Italian navy. These opportunities were certainly not neglected, and in the twenty-five months that Simpson was in command his submarines damaged two Italian battleships by torpedo; sank four (and possibly five) cruisers and damaged several others; sank about eight destroyers, and a number of German and Italian U-boats.

"Shrimp" had been in command of the Malta flotilla for nine months before any of his submarines sighted an enemy submarine. This was most remarkable, for the Italians alone were known to have at least seventy submarines in the Mediterranean. The Italian submarines had, however, already suffered heavy loss in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Red Sea, and it seemed that those who were left much preferred to remain in harbour. When, however, they did put in an appearance at sea, our submarines were not slow to take advantage of the fact.

In several of his official reports Simpson paid high tribute to the work of the Royal Air Force for the constant co-operation and accurate reconnaissances, which frequently detected an alteration in the routing of the enemy's convoys and enabled the submarines to be moved so as to be able to attack on the new course of the convoys.

The work of operating the submarines and placing them in the best possible positions for intercepting the enemy, and of administering the flotilla, had to be done under great difficulties imposed by the "blitz" conditions under which Malta was living. The small promontory where the submarine base was situated received up-

wards of 400 bombs, and many more fell in the harbour close to the submarine berths. When the flotilla first began to operate, and the Luftwaffe put in an appearance, there were no adequate arrangements for conducting the business of the submarine base under almost continuous air attack. The mess decks were hit and some of them demolished. The officers' mess was demolished, moved, demolished again, till its members began to wonder where the ever-moving mess would be next, but this was happily solved by the officers having a table in the seamen's and stokers' dining hall, and took all meals there for six weeks. Just after the officers returned to a new-found wardroom, this dining hall was hit and demolished, so the men were moved to another hall which was all ready prepared in anticipation of this further annoyance. Never once was a meal as much as an hour late.

The mess decks were moved down on to the lower floors of the buildings, into chambers which had been built as store rooms by the Knights of St. John in the sixteenth century. It was found that the Knights had built a wide channel for the drainage of these store rooms, and this was adapted as an air-raid shelter. It had the great merit of opening direct from the store rooms used as mess decks. In all these troubles the submarine base received great assistance from the Dockyard Civil Engineers.

Workshops had to be set up for the repair of material and the construction of spare parts for submarines, which were few and far between in Malta under siege. Commander (E.) "Sam" MacGregor, Simpson's flotilla engineer officer, did wonders, and overcame all difficulties. During the "blitz" it would have been folly to keep those submarines which were in harbour lying alongside the submarine base. They were dispersed about the harbour, where they dived and lay on the bottom during the day. This reduced the refitting hours to those of darkness, and all work had to be done under rigorous blackout conditions and with frequent interruptions due to raids.

Stores of all sorts, and spare parts, were short and often unobtainable. Very often it was a case of "making do." Frequently "Sam" MacGregor was forced to take equipment out of a submarine which had just returned from patrol and instal it in another to make her fit to go to sea. Torpedoes became desperately short, and the expenditure of torpedoes by the Tenth Flotilla was prodigious. More torpedoes, and many other submarine stores, were run into

Malta by larger submarines. This service was unspectacular, and it was unpopular with submarine personnel because the submarines, when store-carrying, were virtually non-operational against the enemy, but it was a vital service without which the Tenth Flotilla could not have operated so successfully.

Simpson also had to think of the comfort and recreation of his submarine crews when in harbour. He considered that the first essential for the crew of a submarine, who had been shut into a small steel hull for weeks and had been all the time on the alert, was a feeling of freedom. The difficulty was to produce any feeling of freedom in a small island under siege and air bombardment.

During the time when the "blitz" was not so bad, owing to the transfer of the Luftwaffe to the Russian front—that is, from mid-May, 1941, to late December, 1941—Simpson, with the help of the provost-marshal, contracted for a number of flats in the neighbourhood. These were turned over to the crews of submarines just back from patrol, where they could set up "chummeries" and live a life apart from that of the submarine base. Thus did he achieve for these men the feeling of freedom which they so badly needed. The scheme proved a great success, and never once were the privileges abused.

"Shrimp" Simpson also started a pig farm. Although the sailors took scant interest in the pigs until the time came to eat them, the farm provided a valuable addition to the dietary resources of Malta under siege, and caused a certain amount of much-needed amusement into the bargain.

The amenities for outdoor recreation varied with the number of bomb craters in the playing fields. For indoor recreation Simpson secured the cinema projector from the disused destroyer canteen of peace time, and set it up in the submarine base. Of films there were no lack in the island. Malta, even in peace time, does not possess sufficiently regular and rapid communications with the outside world to be on one of the recognised "circuits" for films, and the cinema proprietors in the island were therefore compelled to buy copies of the films they wished to show. The result was an extensive film "library," of which the cinema proprietors of Malta made Simpson free.

Simpson considers that one of the most successful phases of the operations of the Malta Submarine Flotilla was between June 1st and October 1st, 1941, when the enemy was using large liners to

reinforce his African armies. Five of these were sunk, the *Conte Rosso*, *Esperia*, *Oceania*, *Neptunia*, and a large unidentified two-funnel liner. All these ships were southbound and crowded with troops. "The reason I consider this particularly successful," says Simpson, "is because thereafter the enemy only tried once again to send a liner to Tripoli, the *Viktoria*, and she was sunk by the Fleet Air Arm. This had the inevitable result of throwing a great strain on the Luftwaffe's JU 52 transport aircraft, which the Germans badly needed in Russia."

The month of September, 1941, was outstanding for the magnificent efforts of the submarines, the Fleet Air Arm, and the Royal Air Force. Hardly a day passed without some heavy loss to the enemy, and it is doubtful if 50 per cent of his shipping reached Libya. Submarines and aircraft sank twenty ships, possibly another nine, totalling 132,000 tons, and damaged a further 118,000 tons. Apart from this, one destroyer was sunk and a cruiser and two destroyers damaged. The strain on the enemy must therefore have been very serious.

During the whole time the Luftwaffe was busy in Russia, Simpson was busy planning and hollowing out shelters in the soft limestone rock of Malta. He had no doubt that the Luftwaffe would return with renewed fury when the weather in Northern Europe deteriorated, since flying conditions over Malta would then be exceptionally good. He was right. That Luftwaffe returned in force just before Christmas, but by that time Simpson was able to sleep 600 men under rock, and had also moved many of the workshops under rock so that work could continue without interruption whatever the Luftwaffe did.

Throughout the whole of the very intense air bombardment, which reached its peak in March and April, 1942, the submarines continued to operate normally and add to their many successes in sinking enemy shipping. In harbour, however, the "blitz" made living conditions more than uncomfortable, and during those hectic months there was a tendency for commanding officers of submarines to ask Simpson if they could go to sea for a rest.

The Tenth Submarine Flotilla did not achieve its great record of successes without loss. Its losses were, indeed, grievous. They were not by any means regular. Sometimes the flotilla operated for two or three months without the loss of a submarine, then two and sometimes three submarines in quick succession would

fail to answer signals or return from patrol. One of Simpson's most anxious tasks was weighing all available evidence and trying to deduce the reason for a loss so that he should not send another submarine into the same unexpected danger.

In spite of heavy losses, however, and the worst the enemy air forces could do, the morale of the flotilla remained unshakeably high. In an operational submarine flotilla losses have far more effect upon the base personnel than on the crews of the submarines. This is because the submarines are always coming and going on patrol. The crew of one submarine in a flotilla may not see the crew of another submarine in the same flotilla for many months on end, as one may always be at sea when the other is in harbour. The submarine crews are therefore accustomed to finding vacant places in the mess decks at their base. For the base personnel it is very different. They see the crews of all submarines every time they come into harbour. A loss is to them far more personal and poignant. They have to go through and pack up the "effects" of those who are missing. Most of all does a loss affect the Commanding Officer of the Flotilla. His is the responsibility. He knows at once if a submarine fails to answer a signal. His is the anxiety, which he must keep to himself, hoping all the time, but feeling that hope fading hour by hour. And when there can be no more hope it is his duty to tell the others and to report by signal to the Commander-in-Chief: "Regret — overdue since — must be presumed lost."

One loss sustained by the Tenth Submarine Flotilla while Simpson was in command affected him more deeply than the others. Not only was the commanding officer and the whole crew outstanding, but the former had also been a very great personal friend. This was H.M. Submarine *Upholder*, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Malcolm David Wanklyn, V.C., D.S.O. and two bars.

Simpson afterwards wrote of Wanklyn and his work as follows: "I hope it is not out of place to take this opportunity of paying some slight tribute to Lieutenant-Commander David Wanklyn, V.C., D.S.O., and his company in H.M.S. *Upholder*—whose brilliant record will always shine in the records of British submarines and in the history of the Mediterranean Fleet in this war.

"The *Upholder* would have returned to the United Kingdom on completion of this patrol. She had carried out twenty-three suc-

cessful attacks against the enemy, and the targets attacked had almost always been heavily escorted, or else enemy war vessels.

"Apart from the selfish feeling of the loss of a personal friend who had been my First Lieutenant in peace time, and latterly a particularly valuable adviser on all operational matters, it seems to me that Wanklyn was a man that the nation can ill afford to lose.

"His modesty, determination, and exceptionally fine character made him a natural leader who received automatically the loyalty and maximum effort of all who served with him. As an example of this, during the past year two or three apparently worthless scamps have been drafted to the *Upholder*, never again to appear at the defaulters' table. Wanklyn had exceptional intellectual ability and judgment beyond his years.

"I am glad to think that some time ago I asked him if he would not like to return to the United Kingdom, since I thought he looked tired, to which he replied that it was his ambition to return to the United Kingdom in command of the *Upholder*. Later he asked me if the docking of the *Upholder* could be changed with another submarine so that he could remain in the Mediterranean longer and 'add to his bag.' I refused.

"During ten and a half days in port before sailing on this patrol, Wanklyn was living ashore with friends and he and all on board sailed in great heart and thoroughly rested."

A week before he left Malta "Shrimp" Simpson had the satisfaction of hearing that the work of the Tenth Submarine Flotilla had been rewarded. Tripoli had fallen to the Eighth Army. There is no doubt that history will allot a large share of the credit for the victories of the Eighth Army to the submarines which had operated so successfully from Malta in defiance of all difficulties and dangers.

The Polish submarine *Sokol*, which had been built as H.M.S. *Urchin* but presented to the Polish Navy before being commissioned, had been attached to the Tenth Submarine Flotilla under Simpson's command, and had worked with consistent and conspicuous success against the enemy. Her commanding officer wears the ribbon of the D.S.O. and Simpson wears the blue and black ribbon of the Polish "*Virtuti Militari*" as well as the C.B.E. he was awarded for his work in command of the Malta submarines.

When Simpson left Malta he took passage in one of H.M. ships,



Captain G. W. G. Simpson

which was torpedoed and sunk between Malta and Alexandria. He said afterwards: "During the four and a half hours that I was swimming around I had to admit that there was a certain amount of poetic justice in it."

He tells a good story of some men on a raft at that time. One sailor kept on asking another, who had an electric torch, to show a light, but the latter refused, having wisely decided to save the battery for signalling when help was near. A third sailor eventually got annoyed with the repeated and importunate demands for a light, and remarked acidly to the offender, "We're all bloody wet, Johnstone, but you're the only one that's dripping." At this, a Chief Petty Officer on the raft intervened with: "Now, now, gentlemen! This is neither the time nor the place to get annoyed with one another."

"Shrimp" Simpson has now gone to Londonderry as Commodore, where he will bring his great experience of operating submarines to bear on the task of waging the war against the U-boats in the Atlantic.

SIR JAMES FOWNES SOMERVILLE

K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O.

Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

THE RECORDS of this war shine with examples of officers who have come out of retirement to serve their country. In modern times, however, there is only one instance of a flag officer who had been invalided out of the Royal Navy "coming back" and becoming one of our greatest fighting Admirals. That instance is provided by James Fownes Somerville.

Early in 1939 Admiral Somerville, who was then serving as Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, was invalided home. A medical board diagnosed tuberculosis, and he was accordingly placed by the Admiralty on the retired list on July 31st, 1939, on grounds of ill-health. Somerville was not satisfied. He consulted specialists. They gave him a clean bill of health. But Admiral Somerville's sea career was already ended, or so it seemed at the time.

Then came the war, and the Admiralty realised that adherence to all the regulations and precedents in the world would not compensate the nation for the loss of an officer of James Somerville's ability. On September 5th, 1939, therefore, he was pronounced "recovered" and once again got into naval uniform, although only as a "retired officer." The war was less than a year old before Somerville's name and that of the force he commanded—"Force H"—became associated with some of the most daring and successful actions of the war at sea.

"Force H" was based on Gibraltar. In the Mediterranean it operated as the western counterpoint to Admiral Cunningham's Mediterranean Fleet, while in the Atlantic it acted as a southern component to the main Home Fleet. Its activities have added many pages of glory to history; its operations were habitually undertaken, not only with determination and valour in the face of heavy odds, but with a lighthearted spirit, which made dangers and difficulties seem of small account.

This spirit the officers and men of "Force H" caught from the man who led them. They soon became imbued, not only with

Somerville's drive and desire to get at the enemy—with his ability always to be right on top of his job and think twice as quickly as the next man—but also with his irrepressible sense of humour. Of the latter, the signal logs of the ships of "Force H" and of the Mediterranean Fleet bear silent witness. Somerville at the western end of the Mediterranean was the perfect partner and foil for Cunningham at its eastern end. Many of the signals which passed between them have already become almost legendary and taken their place in that unwritten history which is told and re-told in the wardrooms and on the mess decks of His Majesty's ships. Unhappily, they will not stand cold print or the strict scrutiny of the censor. Both these great Admirals have minds which work like lightning, and ever-ready wits. They vied with one another, trying always to cap each other's sallies. Often they were Rabelasian; always they were in language that sailors understand, and they played a most important part in building up and maintaining exceptionally high morale and much friendly rivalry between the two British naval forces in the Mediterranean.

There is no doubt whatever that had it not been for the exploits of "Force H" under Admiral Somerville the situation of the United Nations would have been very different from what it now is. Malta would have fallen; the Axis would probably have dominated the whole of the North African coast; the *Bismarck* would have escaped and might, after repair, have done irreparable damage to the sea traffic without which Britain could not live, let alone prosecute a great and bitter war.

One of James Somerville's first tasks in command of "Force H" was the melancholy and extremely distasteful action at Oran. France, our gallant ally, whose ships had held the western basin of the Mediterranean, had been beaten to her knees by the German onslaught and stabbed in the back by Italy. Marshal Petain had set up an emergency Government which had accepted German armistice terms and showed every sign of being forced to agree to any demand which the Germans might make of France.

At Oran lay the main body of the French Fleet in the western basin of the Mediterranean, including the fine modern battle cruisers *Strasbourg* and *Dunkerque*. That the Axis was already casting covetous eyes on these ships was obvious, and if they and others fell into enemy hands the whole balance of sea-power would be upset. It was acknowledged that no French naval officer would be a party

to giving or selling the ships of the French Navy to Hitler or Mussolini, but this was not considered sufficient guarantee. Petain's Government at Vichy was talking of "collaboration" with Germany, and incredible events were taking place in France under "*force majeure*."

The problem of the French ships at Oran was not one of securing their use to Britain, but one of preventing them falling into the hands of the enemy. It was essential that they should be effectively neutralised, and it was earnestly hoped that this could be done by negotiation. At the same time, no chances could be taken.

This was the situation when Admiral Somerville appeared off Oran with "Force H" on the morning of July 3rd. Admiral Somerville had with him Captain C. S. Holland, who had until recently been the British Naval Attaché in Paris and who was a sympathetic and personal friend of many officers in the French Navy. Holland went into Oran in a destroyer to call on the French Admiral Gensoul, taking with him the terms of the British Government for the effective neutralisation of the French warships. These terms were that the French ships should join Britain again as Allies, sail to a British port, or sail to a French West Indies port to be demilitarised for the duration of the war. Alternatively, the ships could be rendered unfit for any further service, either by the French to the satisfaction of the British officers, or by British boarding parties. An answer was required within six hours.

Unfortunately Admiral Gensoul considered that his loyalty to the Vichy Government prevented him from taking any of the courses suggested, or even, for some time, from seeing Captain Holland. The latter parleyed with members of Admiral Gensoul's staff and did everything possible to avert the necessity of using force—but to no avail. At 4 p.m. Admiral Gensoul consented to see Captain Holland, and received him on board his flagship. Captain Holland had to admit that the French naval authorities would listen to no reason, and that force would have to be used to secure the effective neutralisation of the French warships.

At 5.53 p.m. on July 3rd, Admiral Somerville was forced to begin one of the most hateful tasks which has ever befallen a British naval officer. The guns of his force opened fire upon the ships of a former ally, and shortly afterwards naval aircraft from H.M.S. *Ark Royal* were also employed. As a result, practically every ship at Oran was disposed of except one of the battle cruisers. This ship

escaped, but was hit by a torpedo and so damaged as to be rendered unfit for service for some time.

Having done his duty, Admiral Somerville withdrew. He likes to think that the fact that "Force H" was so often a potent force against the enemy was a measure of compensation for having been compelled to take action against friends and erstwhile allies.

The gallant island of Malta under siege became one of Admiral Somerville's chief preoccupations. Time and again convoys were run through the Western Mediterranean with supplies for Malta under cover provided by Admiral Somerville's "Force H." Nor was "Force H" solely concerned with supplying Malta with necessities carried in the holds of ships. Malta's survival depended to a great degree upon reinforcements of fighter aircraft. These Somerville delivered. Time and again "Force H" took aircraft carriers laden with Hurricanes and Spitfires to the Central Mediterranean, where the fighters were flown off the carriers within easy range of Malta.

In this way the Royal Navy delivered some 800 Royal Air Force fighter aircraft to Malta. It was these fighters which turned the scale and enabled Malta not only to survive the worst and most sustained "blitz" in history, but to hit back and give the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica a memorable mauling.

Admiral Somerville and his men in "Force H" had good reason to dislike the enemy forces. In the whole history of the war no naval force has been so heavily and so consistently attacked from the air as "Force H" during its many excursions into the Central Mediterranean. Yet Somerville's ships were not content only to "take it." Time after time they carried the war to the enemy.

The first occasion was on August 2nd, 1940, when aircraft from H.M.S. *Ark Royal* attacked Cagliari, the great Italian base in Sardinia. James Somerville said that "The object of this operation is to test the quality of the ice cream"—a characteristic understatement. In fact, Somerville was passing an important convoy through the Central Mediterranean and Cagliari was raided not only to test the Italian defences, but also to make the Italians keep their heads down while the convoy was passing.

It is interesting to note that Somerville in the Western Mediterranean was developing the use of the aircraft carrier—to the great discomfiture of the enemy—just as Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham was doing in the Eastern Mediterranean. The two Admirals

used aircraft carriers as they had never been used before. Somerville used to refer to his naval aircraft as his "guardian angels," but he was habitually using them offensively as well as defensively.

He cherished them and gave them an important place in all his strategy and tactics. Frequently he flew with them so that he should be in a position to appreciate their problems as well as his own.

It was from the duty of covering the passage of a convoy from Malta that there arose Admiral Somerville's only opportunity of engaging the surface ships of the Italian Navy.

It was on the morning of November 27th, 1940, that two enemy battleships and a force of cruisers were reported at sea to the south-west of Sardinia. They were sighted by a patrolling Swordfish from the *Ark Royal*, "Force H's" famous aircraft carrier. Well to the south of the enemy were the battleship *Ramillies* and the cruisers *Berwick* and *Newcastle*; while farther to the westward was Admiral Somerville, with his flag flying in the battle cruiser *Renown*, and with an important convoy under his wing.

As usual, the enemy was in superior force. One of his battleships was the new *Vittorio Veneto*, capable of well over 30 knots; while the *Renown* could steam at only about 28 knots and the *Ramillies* was capable of no more than 21 knots. Moreover, the Italian battleships had with them six cruisers and sixteen destroyers, and were untrammelled by other responsibilities such as a convoy of vulnerable merchant ships.

By rights Admiral Somerville should have been in an awkward position, but he at once seized the initiative and became master of the situation.

Somerville gathered his forces and went straight for the enemy, and the enemy turned tail. What might have been an action with the odds heavily in the Italian favour became a chase, with the enemy ships scuttling back to harbour as fast as their high-powered engines could drive them.

The cruisers got into action, and the *Berwick* was hit and had one gun turret put out of action. The *Renown* opened fire at a range of twelve and a half miles and was in action for about a quarter of an hour, but the *Ramillies* was unable to get within range.

There was but one hope of bringing the enemy to close action. That was by "winging" one or more of his fleeing ships by attack.

with an air striking force. Somerville called on his "guardian angels." Eleven Swordfish were flown off from the *Ark Royal*. They found the enemy, dived to the attack through a formidable anti-aircraft barrage, passed over the destroyers of the screen, and dropped their torpedoes only 700 yards from the *Vittorio Veneto*. One torpedo hit the Italian flagship just abaft the funnel. A great column of water and brown smoke rose as high as her masthead. Her speed fell off, but unfortunately not sufficiently to allow the much slower British ships to come up with her. Later that day other striking forces, both of torpedo-carrying aircraft and of Skua dive bombers, were flown off the *Ark Royal*. No further action between the surface ships developed, but the enemy suffered damage to at least two cruisers as well as to his flagship. "Force H" was bombed again and again during the afternoon, the Italians paying particular attention to the *Ark Royal*. At one time the aircraft carrier disappeared behind a wall of water flung up by a "stick" of bombs, some of which were no more than twenty yards from her side. Somerville, watching from the bridge of the *Renown*, thought she had gone, but she came out of the splashes and spray undamaged and with all her guns blazing. Apart from the shell which hit the *Berwick*, "Force H" suffered neither casualties nor damage.

This "Action off Cape Spartivento" was unsatisfactory and inconclusive in that the enemy was not forced to stand and fight, but a superior enemy force had been driven off with damage while the convoy continued serenely on its way. Somerville had established a moral ascendancy over the enemy.

James Somerville is not the man to be content to play a defensive role. On February 9th, 1941, he carried the war to the enemy to a degree which theorists might well have considered too dangerous to be seriously contemplated.

German troops had moved into Italy and were moving into Libya to stiffen their weaker Italian partners. The resources of the great port of Genoa were mobilised for the movement of these German troops and their masses of equipment.

Such was the situation when, just before dawn on February 9th, 1941, "Force H" appeared off the port of Genoa, in waters which the enemy had every right to consider inviolable, and the Genoese and Germans awoke to the crashing impact of salvoes of 15-inch shells.

"The scene off Genoa immediately before opening fire was almost dramatic in its contrasts," wrote Somerville. "A fine, calm morning, the foreshore hidden from view by haze above which the mountains stood out, turning from grey to rose with the rising sun—nothing to break the peace and silence of the Sunday morning until the *Renown* fired her first salvo. In spite of what the Italians may have to say, this bombardment must have had a shattering effect on the morale of the people of Genoa, as it would on the people of any other town whose defenders had been so criminally negligent in the performance of their duty."

While the naval bombardment was playing havoc with the shipping and the harbour installations at Genoa, naval aircraft from the *Ark Royal* attacked targets at Spezzia, Pisa and Leghorn. Then Somerville withdrew his force, having met with no opposition, but having demonstrated that Mussolini's boast of *mare nostrum* could not be applied even to the coastal waters of the Gulf of Genoa.

The next month or two found Somerville and "Force H" operating in the Atlantic, guarding our West African convoy route against the German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, which were at large.

Bad luck robbed Somerville of opportunity of striking at the German battle cruisers, but his ships and aircraft found and accounted for three of the raiders' supply ships, and this forced them to forsake the open sea and put into Brest, where they were held for a year by the Royal Air Force.

One of the German supply ships was a British tanker, the *San Casimiro*, which had been captured by the Germans. The ship herself was scuttled by the Germans, but the German prize crew were taken prisoner by the *Renown* and the British crew of the ship, who were held prisoner on board, were rescued.

Somerville was lying at Gibraltar when, at two o'clock on the morning of May 24th, 1941, he received news that the German battleship *Bismarck* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* were at sea. At first it seemed that this news, coming from the edge of the Greenland ice pack, could scarcely affect "Force H" at Gibraltar. Naval operations are, however, apt to call for the co-operation of forces far removed from the probable scene of action. Somerville knew this from experience, and he at once brought his ships to readiness for sailing at short notice. It was a wise step. Very soon after-

wards Admiral Somerville received orders from the Admiralty to proceed into the Atlantic with "Force H" and steam north-west at high speed in order to place his ships across the probable line of retreat of the enemy to the French Atlantic ports.

Somerville's flag was flying in H.M.S. *Renown*, and he had with him the faithful *Ark Royal* and the cruiser *Sheffield*. This force punched its way northward in increasingly bad weather, the aircraft from the *Ark Royal* keeping an anti-submarine patrol ahead of the ships despite the bad conditions.

Soon after 3 a.m. on May 25th, the *Norfolk*, *Suffolk* and *Prince of Wales*, who had been shadowing the enemy, lost touch with the *Bismarck*. The German ship disappeared as completely as if she had sunk. Anxiety ran high, and the widest possible searches were instituted, but it had to be admitted that these were hampered by the weather conditions.

The weather also delayed Somerville's "Force H." He had expected to reach a position close to the enemy's probable line of escape to France by the early morning of May 26th. "Force H" made the best possible speed, driving into the north-westerly gale at 21 knots; but even so, it was two hours late in reaching the position from which Somerville had determined to begin his searches with the aircraft from the *Ark Royal*.

Thus it was that Somerville did not reach that position until about 9 a.m. on the 26th. What was worse, the weather was so bad that flying from an aircraft carrier was most hazardous. In peace time it would never have been attempted in that weather. The flight deck of the *Ark Royal*, normally sixty-two feet above the water line, was being swept by spray, and green seas were coming over the fore end of this deck. Ranged aircraft were sliding bodily across the deck with the motion of the ship. Men could hardly stand on the slippery wet deck against the force of the wind, let alone handle aircraft.

But it would have taken more than bad weather to prevent the Fleet Air Arm from flying that day. The position reached, the first searching flight was flown off. On the high but canting flight deck the *Swordfish* took off with their wheels in salt water, adding the spray of their passage to that which continually swept across the deck.

At 10.40 that morning Somerville received the news that the *Bismarck* had been found—by a Catalina flying boat of the R.A.F.

Coastal Command. Yet the *Ark Royal's* search was far from being in vain. The Catalina broke cloud cover and was at once fired on by the *Bismarck*. It was damaged and driven off. The *Bismarck* might have been lost again, but only fourteen minutes after the Catalina had been driven off one of the *Ark Royal's* Swordfish made contact with the German battleship. It was never again lost despite the difficulties and hazards imposed by the weather.

A good story is told of one of the *Ark Royal's* shadowing aircraft. It lost touch with the *Bismarck* for a while in a rain squall. When the squall passed the Swordfish saw a ship which he took to be a British battleship. He signalled to it, "Where is the ruddy *Bismarck*?" and was promptly answered by a salvo from the *Bismarck's* guns.

Somerville realised that the only hope of preventing the escape of the *Bismarck* to a French port lay in attacks by aircraft from the *Ark Royal*. First, however, the searching aircraft had to be got back to the carrier. Meanwhile Somerville detached the cruiser *Sheffield* to make contact with the *Bismarck* and shadow her.

Never had such great responsibility devolved upon the Fleet Air Arm, and never before had naval airmen been called upon to operate under such conditions. With the *Ark Royal* steaming at only 8 knots the strength of the wind along the flight deck was 40 knots. The after end of the flight deck, over which the aircraft had to come in low in order to land on, was rising and falling no less than fifty-six feet. The whole deck was swaying incessantly.

In these conditions it was not surprising that it was 2.50 p.m. before the first striking force of Swordfish could be flown off.

This attack was abortive, and nearly led to tragedy. The Swordfish, flying through driving rain squalls, in visibility which was often reduced to a few yards, suddenly saw a ship beneath them. Without a moment's hesitation they dived to the attack. Too late, some of the pilots realised that the ship was not the *Bismarck* but the *Sheffield*, which, unknown to the pilots, had been detached about an hour before the Swordfish took off. The *Sheffield*, however, was quick to appreciate the situation and take effective avoiding action. None of the torpedoes hit. One pilot, as he roared away into the storm, signalled his apology: "Sorry for the kipper."

The mistake was serious. It meant that the Swordfish had to return to the *Ark Royal* and be re-armed with more torpedoes before being able to attack the *Bismarck*, and under the conditions obtaining this could not but take a considerable time.

Meanwhile the *Sheffield* had made contact with the *Bismarck*, and Admiral Somerville in the *Renown* was trying to "keep the ring" until Admiral Tovey should come up with the enemy. Somerville had to remain out of range of the *Bismarck*. He had been ordered by the Admiralty not to engage, for the *Renown*, with her lower speed, smaller armament, and light armour protection, would have had scant chance of survival in action with the great German battleship.

It was seven o'clock that evening before a second striking force was ready to fly off from the *Ark Royal*. Neither the air crews nor Admiral Somerville were under any illusions of how much depended upon their efforts.

The striking force arrived over the *Bismarck* at nine o'clock, and, as if they had not already had to contend with weather conditions bad enough, they found above the *Bismarck* a great bank of cloud. This made concerted attacks impossible. The striking force became split up and the aircraft were compelled to attack as best they could, in sub-flights and even single aircraft acting independently. But they pressed home their attacks "with a gallantry and determination which cannot be praised too highly."

All the aircraft returned, the last of them landing on in the gathering dusk at 11 p.m. The results of their efforts could not be immediately assessed, however. The air crews were bitterly disappointed that they had been prevented by the cloud bank from carrying out a "copy book" concerted attack. There was a tendency to underestimate the effect of the attacks. This did not make things any easier for Somerville. He knew that, at that time and for many hours to come, his "Force H" alone stood between the *Bismarck* and escape. Ordered not to engage with the *Renown*, the naval aircraft were his only weapon, and he could not hope to get another striking force into the air before dawn.

Then reports began to come in which showed that the naval aircraft had done their work better than they had thought. The *Bismarck's* speed had been reduced to about 10 knots. She had turned two complete circles and had then begun staggering off slowly to the north-westward—into the wind and away from the sanctuary of the French Atlantic coast. That could mean only one thing. The aircraft had put the *Bismarck's* steering gear out of action.

"Force H" had at last cornered the *Bismarck* and had made certain

that she would remain within a narrow compass while awaiting the final attentions of the Commander-in-Chief.

Admiral Somerville gave full credit to the Fleet Air Arm pilots who had done such magnificent work. He wrote in his despatch:

"I cannot speak too highly of the courage and ability shown by the pilots in handling their aircraft, particularly when landing on in such conditions. It is not only skill that is needed to come in over the flight deck 'round down' when on occasions it is known to be rising and falling 56 feet."

Having delivered the *Bismarck* into the hands of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, Admiral Somerville and "Force H" returned to Gibraltar, and soon they were back at the job of running vital convoys through to Malta. The importance of these convoys was well known to the enemy, who brought very large concentrations of aircraft and U-boats into action in an attempt to stop their passage. Somerville, however, had an answer. It was his signal to his forces covering an important convoy during the third week of July, 1941. "The convoy must go through," he signalled, and in every man there was a determination that the order should be obeyed—a determination which proved more potent than the enemy's bombs and torpedoes.

On the morning of July 22nd, 1941, Somerville and the convoy were still well to the westward of the Sardinian Channel when they were sighted by the enemy's reconnaissance aircraft.

The enemy's first move was to attack, during that night, by U-boat. The attack was unsuccessful, all the torpedoes missing the ships. A very heavy and accurate counter attack with depth charges was at once delivered on the U-boat, and although no definite evidence of its destruction came to the surface, it is thought that the U-boat was sunk.

Next morning the air attacks started. High-level bombers and torpedo-carrying aircraft delivered attacks which were carefully synchronised so that the guns of the ships would have two widely separated targets. Naval fighters from the *Ark Royal* tore in among the high-level bombers. Two of them were shot down and plummeted in flames into the sea. Two others were probably destroyed, and many jettisoned their bombs wide of the convoy and turned tail. Meanwhile the guns of the ships were busy, and three out of six torpedo-carrying aircraft which pressed home their attacks were shot down. Unfortunately the destroyer *Fearless* was hit by

a torpedo and she had to be sunk by our ships since it was impracticable to attempt to tow her back to her base. The convoy went on.

Next morning a Cant flying boat which was shadowing the convoy was shot down by the *Ark Royal's* fighters. That day, however, no serious attacks developed. This Somerville found anything but reassuring. He was convinced that the enemy was saving up something unpleasant for the convoy when it reached the most dangerous part of its passage—the Sicilian Channel.

Sure enough, the attacks began again on the following morning. First another Cant "snooper" was caught by the *Ark Royal's* fighters and shot out of the air. Soon afterwards the bombing began. High-level bombers arrived first. One of their formations was intercepted by our naval fighters, and two of the bombers went down in flames, while the formation was broken up. There followed an attack by torpedo bombers, and then another high-level bombing attack.

All the enemy could do, however, proved futile. The convoy went on.

That night the enemy tried a new form of attack, when the convoy was in the dangerous narrows. Aircraft dropped flares and E-boats attacked. These met with slightly more success. One troopship in the convoy was hit. At once a destroyer went alongside her, but it was found that it was unnecessary to take off the troops or take the ship in tow. She was able to continue under her own steam.

A dawn attack by dive bombers met with no success, and the convoy duly steamed into the Grand Harbour at Valetta. The convoy *had* gone through, and been delivered at Malta without the loss of a single one of those vital troop and supply ships. Somerville's "Force H" was by that time steaming back towards Gibraltar, minus one destroyer but with the satisfaction of knowing that Malta had again been succoured and that the enemy's forces had been mauled in their attempts to interfere.

In October, 1941, Admiral Somerville was again at sea, approaching the Sardinian Channel and covering the passage of a big convoy of troopships, munition ships and store ships for Malta. This time his flag was flying in the battleship *Nelson*.

To begin with the weather was bad, with low cloud and rain—just the weather which a naval commander hopes for when he has to run a convoy past enemy air bases. Unfortunately, however,

the weather suddenly cleared at a critical moment and an enemy reconnaissance aircraft caught sight of the great concourse of ships steaming east towards the narrows.

It was not long, then, before the enemy attacked. He threw in everything in a concentrated series of attacks which lasted only an hour. First came five torpedo bombers. One was hit by gunfire from a destroyer and blown to pieces in the air. The *Ark Royal's* fighters took a hand, and not one of the enemy aircraft succeeded in breaking through the escorts and attacking the merchant ships of the convoy.

Almost immediately a second wave of torpedo-carrying aircraft came in. One dropped his torpedo close to H.M.S. *Nelson*, Admiral Somerville's flagship. It hit the battleship forward. A great column of water was thrown up, but the ship was not badly damaged and there were no casualties. The aircraft itself was promptly shot into the sea. For an hour apparent confusion reigned, with aircraft coming in to attack every few minutes, guns roaring and the naval fighters working like mad to break up the enemy formations and shoot down as many of the enemy aircraft as possible before their attacks could develop.

Then came further excitement. Units of the Italian Navy were sighted at sea, some sixty miles away to the south-eastward. At once Somerville ordered the *Ark Royal* to fly off a torpedo striking force to attack the enemy, while he turned a powerful squadron of his force at full speed to try to intercept the enemy ships and bring them to action.

The Italians, however, were wary and turned tail at once, so that there was no chance of their being caught by slower ships. Even the air striking force was prevented from attacking.

Disappointed at not being able to bring the enemy ships to action, Somerville still had the satisfaction of knowing that he had again reinforced and supplied Malta in its hour of need. Again the convoy had gone through—this time with the loss of one ship, a small enough loss when one considers the scale of the risk. The damaged *Nelson* was soon repaired and back in service, while the enemy had lost at least thirteen aircraft. The *Ark Royal* had lost three fighters, but the crews of two of them had been safely picked up by our destroyers.

On the 13th November, 1941, tragedy befell "Force H." The force was returning to Gibraltar and was within thirty miles of

the Rock when, at 3.25 in the afternoon, the faithful *Ark Royal* was torpedoed by a U-boat. Frantic efforts were made to save the ship, and for a time it seemed that these would be successful, but they were brought to nought by an outbreak of fire in the port boiler room. She had to be abandoned, and at 6.13 on the morning of November 14th, she capsized, remained bottom up for a few minutes, and then sank.

Admiral Somerville, who had referred to the *Ark Royal* aircraft so often as his "guardian angels" and who had said: "If I haven't got the *Ark* with me I feel like a blind beggar without his dog," watched her sink.

Admiral Somerville's flag was then flying in the battleship *Malaya*, which was in company with the *Ark Royal* when that ship was torpedoed. Admiral Somerville at once went on to Gibraltar with the *Malaya* and two destroyers, leaving the remaining destroyers to screen the damaged aircraft carrier. On his arrival at Gibraltar Admiral Somerville transferred to the destroyer *Sikh* and went back to the scene. He transferred to a motor launch in order to go alongside the stricken aircraft carrier, and then went back to a destroyer.

It would have been difficult to find two sadder men than Admiral Somerville and Captain Maund of the *Ark Royal* as they stood on the bridge of the destroyer and watched helplessly as the list of the *Ark* slowly but inexorably increased until her flight deck was vertical and she eventually capsized. Just before the great aircraft carrier took her final plunge Somerville took Maund below.

James Somerville's term of appointment as "Flag Officer, Force H" was nearing its end. He had held the Western Mediterranean through the most difficult period in those waters and had also made his presence felt in the Atlantic. He was destined to take over high command in another theatre of war where British fortunes were passing through a critical period. In April, 1942, James Somerville became Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Fleet.

No Admiral can ever have been given a more difficult appointment. Japan's southward drive had given her conquests which had made her master of the south-west Pacific right down to the coastal waters of Australia. There seemed every prospect that Japan might also dominate the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. British islands in the Bay of Bengal had been occupied by the Japanese. Colombo was raided and British warships were sunk off

Ceylon by Japanese aircraft operating from aircraft carriers working under the protection of a powerful Japanese fleet.

In the circumstances a fleet had to be hastily got together in order to guard our vital communications in the western Indian Ocean. Not only were our sea routes to India and Australia and New Zealand in dire peril; the fate of the British Middle East armies, of Egypt and the Suez Canal, depended upon the protection of our shipping in the western Indian Ocean, for the Mediterranean was not yet open, and all supplies and reinforcements for the Middle East had to travel round the Cape of Good Hope and up the east coast of Africa. Moreover, the threat presented by the Japanese was infinitely stronger than any force which could then be spared to counter that threat.

The story of the formation and operation of the newly constituted Eastern Fleet cannot yet be written, and little can be said about it. One can but judge by results. The vital trade routes in the Indian Ocean suffered none of the crippling losses threatened by the Japanese. The Japanese Navy ceased to be reported in force in the Bay of Bengal or the Indian Ocean. And before very many months had passed there were indications of a move towards the offensive in this theatre of war as well as in others. Reports began to come through of successful attacks by British and Dutch submarines against Japanese seaborne communications. It became clear that the desperately dangerous naval situation in the East had been stabilised and that every opportunity was being taken of hitting back at the enemy. A great share in the credit for this radical change in the situation must go to Admiral Somerville.

As Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, James Somerville's flair for obtaining and holding the affection and respect of all men serving with him was, and is, of immense value. A great many of the men who suddenly found themselves in the Eastern Fleet had already been abroad for over two years, and they were prone to think that their right to return home and get some well-deserved leave had been sacrificed in order to form the Eastern Fleet, where they heard no news from home for many months. In this belief many were perfectly right, but Somerville soon showed them that their disappointment was caused by necessity and not by a whim of Their Lordships at the Admiralty, upon whom the sailor is wont to blame the slightest and greatest inconveniences to which he may be subjected.



Admiral Sir James F. Somerville

In this task James Somerville's experience as Director of Personal Services at the Admiralty—a post which he had held during the difficult years from 1934 to 1936—served him well. The Lower Deck, even if they did not know him personally, knew that he was a sympathetic friend, and the growing number who knew him personally would gladly have forgone any other privilege in order to serve with him. There have been very few officers in recent times who could compete with James Somerville in his knowledge and understanding of the sailor and his problems. He takes the trouble to study their domestic as well as their professional problems. He can talk the same language as they do and can meet them on their own ground. For instance, just before he became Director of Personal Services he went deeply into the problems created by the growth of credit trading and particularly of the hire-purchase system. He was well aware of the temptations these systems created, and the fact that men who were serving abroad sometimes got rude and even threatening letters when payments could not be kept up owing to unforeseen circumstances. He realised that agents sometimes forced goods upon sailors' wives, with the result that trouble arose in the sailors' families.

James Somerville probably knows more of the problems, difficulties and mental processes of the sailor than any other naval officer, and he places his knowledge, experience, and his ability to get things done unreservedly at their disposal once he is convinced that their cause is right. That is one reason why Somerville's men will go anywhere with him and do anything for him. At the same time he is a stickler for discipline and a warrior for conduct. A man who tries to lead James Somerville "up the garden" will get short shrift either from the Admiral or from his messmates.

The more one considers the careers of great sea captains the more one is struck by the fact that the man who is "good with his men" is, in the vast majority of cases, also a good officer from the technical and material standpoint.

So it is with James Somerville. In the first place he is a technician of no mean order. As a young lieutenant he specialised in torpedo work, a form of specialisation which includes intimate knowledge of electricity. Then, in 1912, he became a specialist in wireless telegraphy. Of his ability in this sphere and the way in which he kept himself up to date with the latest developments of this fast-moving service there can be no better witness than his appointment

to the Admiralty early in the war. This appointment was, ostensibly, that of "Inspector of Anti-Aircraft Weapons and Devices." In fact the appointment brought him in very close contact with the Director of the Signal Division of the Naval Staff (an appointment which he had formerly held) while at the same time investigating the possibilities of adapting the principles of radio-location to ships and naval aircraft. Many of the successes achieved by the Navy and the Fleet Air Arm are due to the work which Somerville did at the Admiralty in this connection.

Admiral Sir James Fownes Somerville is a Somerset man. His father, who died in 1942 at the age of ninety-two, lived at Wells and had been a member of the Somersetshire County Council for forty-five years. He was also a member of the House of Laymen and of the National Church Assembly. James Somerville's mother was a Tasmanian, the daughter of Mr. W. S. Sharland of New Norfolk, Tasmania.

Born in July, 1882, James Somerville entered the Royal Navy on January 15th, 1897. During the war of 1914-18 he was Wireless Officer on the staff of the Flag Officer commanding the First Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet, and subsequently Fleet Wireless Officer on the staff of Admiral Sir John de Robeck, commanding our forces at the Dardanelles. During the war he served in the battleships *Marlborough*, *Lord Nelson*, *Queen Elizabeth* and *King George V.* (the predecessor of the present flagship of the Home Fleet). He was mentioned in despatches for his services in connection with the initial landings at Gallipoli, and later awarded the D.S.O. He was invested with the insignia of the D.S.O. by King George V. on board the flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*, on June 24th, 1916. He was again mentioned in despatches for his work in the *King George V.*

In 1927 Somerville received an expression of high appreciation from the Board of Trade for his services on the Wireless Direction Finding Committee.

Wherever there is fighting and an exceptionally difficult job to be done you will find James Somerville. He did great work for humanity while commanding the Mediterranean destroyer flotillas during the Spanish Civil War. He was made a K.C.B. just before the war.

In this war he has been made a K.B.E. "for setting an inspiring example of zeal and devotion to duty. He imbued all those under

his command with a fine offensive spirit." The words are from the official citation in the *London Gazette*. He has also been mentioned in despatches in this war.

The greater the danger and the greater the difficulties the better Somerville seems to be pleased, and the more often his very direct and often caustic wit flashes out. He was at Calais during the last hours of the stand of that gallant garrison, and he played an important part in extricating a large number of French troops from the vicinity. He afterwards paid a striking tribute to the British troops in Calais, but, characteristically, he never said what he himself had done.

James Somerville is very keen on sailing. Many people will remember the accurate scale model of the old *Ajax*—full rigged ship of the line—which he built on the hull of a skiff and used to sail himself at Malta in the early 1920's.

GRAHAM HENRY STOKES

C.B., D.S.C.

Captain, Royal Navy

GRAHAM STOKES was born at Blackheath on September 8th, 1902. On May 26th, 1942, when he was still a Commander, the *London Gazette* contained the announcement that he had been made a Companion of the Order of the Bath "for great skill and enterprise in command of H.M.S. *Sikh* in a brilliant night action in the Central Mediterranean in which, without hurt or loss to the Royal Navy, two Italian cruisers and an E-boat were destroyed, and a torpedo-boat badly damaged." Seven months earlier the *London Gazette* had announced that he had been awarded the D.S.C. for "mastery, determination and skill in action against the German battleship *Bismarck*." Sandwiched between the announcements of these two awards was a statement that he had been mentioned in despatches for "outstanding zeal, patience and cheerfulness."

* To be made a Companion of the Order of the Bath when only of Commander's rank is very exceptional. Stokes is the only one who has attained this distinction in this war, and in the last war only one executive officer was made a C.B. while serving in the rank of Commander. That was Commander James Barr, R.N.R., of the armed merchant cruiser *Carmania*, who was given the honour on June 1st, 1915.

Stokes is more than a little diffident about his high honour and the action by which he earned it. He says that "because I happened to be in command of a division of destroyers at the right place at the right time to sink some particularly stupid Wops, a most disproportionate volume of notoriety has descended upon me." His view is that, finding himself faced with the Italians, he could not have acted otherwise, though he is very sensible of the fact that, had he failed to bring off a spectacular success, he would have merited a court-martial for disobedience of orders. As it was, Stokes agrees with the profound dictum of a certain senior naval officer who did not know him, but who recognised him by his unique combination of medal ribbons and stripes, and

said by way of congratulations: "I see you missed no golden opportunity."

It was shortly after three o'clock on the morning of Saturday, December 13th, 1941, that Stokes found the "golden opportunity" which he could not in reason neglect.

Stokes, in the *Sikh*, was the senior officer of a division of destroyers. The other ships were the *Legion*, *Maori*, and the Dutch destroyer *Isaac Sweers*. These ships were on passage through the Mediterranean, and they were laden with passengers and stores. They were not, during this passage, considered as fighting units, and Stokes had orders to evade the enemy rather than to seek action.

The destroyers were off Cape Bon when Stokes sighted the enemy at a range of about six miles. They were flashing signals to one another, otherwise they might not have been seen. One must remember that the object of the destroyers was to make the passage of the Central Mediterranean undetected. One can therefore sense the possibility of "wishful thinking" in the theory propounded by one of Stokes's officers that the winking lights had been due to phosphorescent waves breaking on the foreshore of Cape Bon. Stokes, however, was unconvinced. As he said afterwards: "Never having seen phosphorescent breakers making the morse code, I took this explanation with rather a large pinch of salt and pressed on to see what we could see."

Soon afterwards Stokes sighted two Italian cruisers. They were seen in plenty of time for the Allied destroyers to make ready for instant action, but Stokes was still mindful of his orders to "evade the enemy." As the destroyers rounded Cape Bon, however, it was seen that the Italian cruisers were turning and heading straight for the Allied destroyers.

In these circumstances Stokes had to make a quick decision. There were only two alternatives; to engage the enemy or to run away. The orders seemed to indicate the latter course, but Stokes was sensible of the fact that the enemy were giving him a great opportunity to prove a cherished theory—that four modern destroyers would prove more than a match for two cruisers at short range. Moreover, Stokes did not relish the idea of running away from Italians, particularly as he might be sighted while so doing and be brought to action under less advantageous conditions.

There was another factor. The geographical position of the two forces relative to the land, and the position of the moon, presented Stokes with an opportunity to get between the enemy and the high land so that the British ships would be virtually invisible, while the enemy would be against the lighter horizon caused by the moon. This opportunity Stokes, with the eye of a tactician, was quick to see and quick to seize upon. He led his ships between the enemy and the loom of the land.

Hardly had he committed himself to this course of action than he began to regret it, for the gap between the enemy ships and the land was narrowing rapidly and alarmingly, but there was no going back. Stokes himself says: "Having once made the decision I would have given all the tea in China to have reversed it, but it was too late. I could not possibly have got out of the extremely tight corner without being seen, so there was nothing left but to hold tight and call upon the God of Jacob to be our Refuge."

So much for the initial manoeuvres which led up to one of the most brilliantly successful actions of this war. As is nearly always the case at sea, the corner-stone of victory had been laid before a gun or torpedo had been fired. The sea sense of a highly trained naval officer had placed the enemy in a position of crippling inferiority before the latter was aware of the presence of a hostile force.

The actual action was a demonstration of what efficient ships can do against inefficient ships at night. The Italians did not see the Allied destroyers until it was too late for them to do anything. So complete was the surprise that two of the *Sikh's* torpedoes hit the leading Italian cruiser while her guns were still trained fore and aft. These torpedoes had been fired at a range of only 1000 yards. The moment Stokes saw them hit the leading enemy ship, he opened fire with his guns on the second Italian cruiser at the almost point-blank range of 700 yards.

This second Italian cruiser was more wide awake than her leader, for her guns were trained on the *Sikh* and she opened fire at once. The Italians, however, seemed unable to believe that the destroyers were so close, for her first salvo was well over and the shells hit Cape Bon with what Stokes describes as a "fearful wallop."

The *Sikh's* first salvo, by contrast, hit the Italian cruiser fairly at the base of her bridge superstructure. This apparently wrecked

all her gun control system, for her main armament never spoke again.

In extenuation of the inefficiency of the Italians it must be remembered that Stokes's initial moves had ensured relative positions in which the enemy ships were fairly clearly visible against a glimmer of moonlight through the clouds in the eastern sky, while the Allied ships must have been very difficult to see against the dark background of the land, even at that short range. Moreover, Stokes's ships were steaming at slow speed so that they showed neither white bow-wave nor wake.

For a few minutes after the *Sikh's* torpedoes and first gun salvo had virtually decided the course of the action the night was hideous with flying tracers and heavy explosions as the *Legion*, *Maori* and *Isaac Sweers* smashed shells and torpedoes into the enemy. The *Sikh* quickly drew clear of the *mêlée*, and on her bridge Stokes stood looking back to see how his friends fared. They all appeared untouched. The only casualty in the Allied force was the *Sikh's* galley funnel, which was on fire. This was due to the cook having failed to clean it, so that the concussion of the guns brought a quantity of soot down on to the hotplate. He was duly "on the mat" in the morning.

The main Italian force had been demolished. The leading Italian cruiser had burned fiercely for a short time and had then blown up. The other cruiser was last seen burning from stem to stern. It was afterwards established that this ship also sank. Of the cruisers' escorts, one E-boat had been sunk and a torpedo boat badly damaged. It was a balance sheet comparable to that of the Battle of Matapan.

Stokes did not turn back to look for survivors or to finish off the burning cruiser. For this he had a very good reason. He knew by that time that Fleet Air Arm Swordfish armed with torpedoes had taken off from Malta in search of the Italian force which he had just annihilated. Had his ships been milling around when the Swordfish arrived at the position where the Italians had been, he might well have been torpedoed by our own "string-bags."

When Stokes arrived at Malta he received a signal from the Swordfish squadron calling his attention to the Gospel of St. John, Chapter 10, verse 1. He looked it up and found: "He that entereth not into the sheepfold by the gate but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

So ended the brilliant action off Cape Bon—an action which might have led to a court-martial for Stokes's interpretation of his order to "evade," had it not proved so successful, but that is the way of life.

Graham Stokes has had a varied career. He has been a submarine officer, a destroyer officer, and now he wears the wings of a Fleet Air Arm pilot above the four gold rings on his left sleeve.

Stokes is a "webfoot" by choice if not by birth. Although born and brought up in Blackheath, his family moved to the West country after the death of his father, when Stokes was a midshipman, and he looks upon Bideford as his home town.

In his youth Stokes was apparently something of an "enfant terrible." His term master at the Royal Naval College, Osborne, exasperated by having to be continually admonishing him for all manner of misdemeanours, once told him that he was the worst naval cadet he had ever had to deal with and that he was applying for Stokes's discharge. Whether this was only a threat, or whether the application was made and refused, Stokes never discovered. At Dartmouth, however, he made good and got his revenge on that master, for he was in the audience when Stokes was presented with his Cadet Captain's stripe. Nevertheless, he was never any good at book work, and mathematics were his bugbear and despair. Stokes will tell you that it was only through the assiduous use of voluminous cribs that he was able to pass any of the examinations at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich and so aspire to the rank of Sub-Lieutenant.

In those days midshipmen from battleships were lent to a destroyer for three months' training in order to give them some initial experience of small ship life. When Stokes was doing his midshipman's time in a destroyer the captain of the destroyer wrote to the captain of the battleship from which Stokes had been lent. In that letter he said that his new midshipman reminded him of nothing so much as a Newfoundland puppy!

One would have thought that a submarine would be the very last place for a "Newfoundland puppy," but Stokes specialised in submarines. In those days of peace every submarine officer had to go back to surface ships for two years' "general service" time after serving for three years in submarines. After his first three years in submarines Stokes was appointed to a destroyer—the *Wolverine*.



Captain G. H. Stokes

Stokes had found submarine life under peace conditions dull and monotonous, as most of it undoubtedly was. He fell in love with destroyer life, with all its immense variety, even in peace time. Stokes prefers steaming at thirty knots to twelve knots, or two knots submerged, which were submarine speeds. Moreover, three years of submarine life did not cure Stokes of his dislike of the smell of breakfast in a confined space—a smell which persists throughout the day in a submarine which dives at dawn.

So Stokes left submarines and took to destroyers. He did a commission on the China Station in the flotilla leader *Keppel* and then came home to take his first command. This was the *Tempest*, which was the gunnery destroyer at Chatham.

Taking gunnery training classes to sea for destroyer firings was not a sufficiently varied life for Stokes, so he set about learning the gentle art of aviation in his spare time, and duly qualified as a pilot. To-day, in command of a naval air station, he wears a pilot's wings—which he refers to as his “driving licence”—and is in the air himself whenever possible. Those wings, however, were not the outcome of official naval training, but of private enterprise. At his air station, which is a training establishment of the Fleet Air Arm, he has his own Gladiator, in which he flies round watching the progress of the training in the air. That Gladiator is known among those under training as “The Gestapo.”

After his first “makee-learn” destroyer command at Chatham, Stokes went to the Mediterranean in command of H.M.S. *Griffin*, of the First Destroyer Flotilla. In his two years in that flotilla, life was sufficiently varied, even for Stokes. The First Flotilla was very hard-worked, first in stopping gun-running and doing all manner of other jobs during the troubles in Palestine, and then in saving lives during the Spanish Civil War and preventing a spread of that conflict.

When war broke out Graham Stokes was a Commander in the Operations Division of the Naval Staff at the Admiralty. Needless to say, this was altogether too much for Stokes. He was absolutely determined to get out of the Admiralty and back to sea at the very earliest possible moment. His own story of how he achieved his end must be taken with a grain of salt, but it is well worth recording as an example of Stokes's dryly humorous approach to a problem.

His story is that he instituted a complicated but efficient system in accordance with the best “prep school” traditions. This organisa-

tion gave him warning of the approach of any senior officer, so that he had ample time to drop any work he was doing and compose himself so that the senior officer would find him comfortable and apparently somnolent in an armchair with his feet on the desk. This system, so Stokes would have us believe, worked so well that within a fortnight the senior members of the Naval Staff were convinced that Stokes had nothing to do in the Admiralty and would therefore be better employed at sea.

So Graham Stokes went back to sea, and took command of the destroyer *Mackay*. In that ship he did much convoy escort work, and then get involved in the withdrawal of British and Allied troops from the Continent. At Dunkirk he had the misfortune to run aground one dark and rainy night in the Zuy de Coote Pass, but he remarked philosophically that at least the *Mackay* served as a navigational mark for other ships.

The *Mackay* got off all right, and did much valuable work in evacuating troops all round the French coast, ending with the extrication of large elements of the Polish Army from St. Jean de Luz.

There followed a period of anti-invasion patrols in the Channel. These were not unexciting at times, particularly when the German 11-inch gun batteries at Cape Griz Nez took a hand in the proceedings.

In October, 1940, Stokes took command of the Tribal class destroyer *Sikh*. He was not too pleased at this, as he was planning to get married and had hoped to secure a few days' leave. The appointment postponed the wedding, as the *Sikh* was then working with the Home Fleet. It was not for very long, however. At three o'clock on one dark January morning, when the *Sikh* was lying at a buoy, Stokes was thrown out of his bunk by a terrific crash. Another destroyer had collided with the *Sikh* in the dark, and the bullring on the bows of this destroyer landed in Stokes's bathroom. As he groped his way out of his cabin in the dark he thought, "That's fixed it anyway; now we can get married." He was right. The wedding took place while the *Sikh's* side was being repaired.

After her repairs the *Sikh* joined Admiral Sir James Somerville's "Force H" at Gibraltar, where they had plenty of action. Malta convoys; escorting aircraft carriers with fighters for Malta to within fighter-flying range of the besieged island; bombardments; U-boat hunts; and the rest.

The *Sikh* was one of the destroyers in Captain Vian's flotilla during the *Bismarck* operation. This flotilla of four British "Tribal" class destroyers and the Polish destroyer *Piorun* made contact with the *Bismarck* on the evening before she was sunk. The *Bismarck* was already behaving erratically as a result of the crippling damage to her steering gear by the aircraft attack from H.M.S. *Ark Royal* but the destroyers soon found that the great German ship's gunnery was in no way impaired.

The primary task of the destroyers was to put the *Bismarck* "in the box" and keep her there, delivering her to the Commander-in-Chief in the morning. To this end the destroyers spread round her. Once that was done it was impossible to concentrate the destroyers again for a concerted torpedo attack. It was a foul night, with a high sea and heavy rain squalls, and it was not even possible to synchronise torpedo attacks by single destroyers from the various bearings on which they were shadowing.

Stokes's description of that night is brief but vivid:

"The foremost consideration in my mind was to keep in touch with her and hope that the battleships would eventually come and finish off the job. Rain squalls, combined with violently fluctuating visibility and the frolics of the *Bismarck*, who was barely under control after the *Ark Royal* had torpedoed her in the business end, made this form of sport somewhat hectic. The Commander-in-Chief's orders to destroyers to fire starshell to indicate their position led to a good deal of unpleasantness from the *Bismarck's* main armament, and I took the dimmest view of the suggestion that we should attack her with torpedoes.

"However, as she stopped at one stage of the proceedings, presumably to try and sort out her damaged rudders, I took the opportunity of drawing a bead on her and succeeded in scoring one torpedo hit—which appeared to make not the slightest difference to the monster.

"An earlier attempt to attack her had been frustrated because, as we turned to fire, my Torpedo Control Officer lost sight of the target at the critical moment, due to the enemy's 15-inch shell splashes. While cursing my Torpedo Control Officer, somewhat unjustly, for a fool, I had not the guts to turn back and try again at that particular juncture. (Life appears a little precarious under accurate 15-inch gunfire when the shells are bursting on impact with the water all round a destroyer.)"

Throughout that night Stokes used two pairs of binoculars, and employed one man all the time drying them alternately and cleaning the wet and salt off the lenses. He used three dozen handkerchiefs in the process. And in the morning Stokes's eyes were "like bloodshot poached eggs."

His part in the *Bismarck* action brought Graham Stokes the D.S.C. "for mastery, determination and skill in action."

ROBERT GRICE STURGES

C.B., D.S.O.

Major-General, Royal Marines

BOB STURGES is a man who works hard, fights hard and plays hard, and he looks it. His very fair hair is now nearly white, but his intense blue eyes are those of a young man enjoying life and his figure is that of an athlete in training. He is steel-fit, and always on the go. He expects all ranks under his command to be meticulously smart and to neglect no smallest detail of their work. It is a standard which he himself certainly lives up to.

Born in Berkshire on July 14th, 1891, and bred in that county, Sturges began his service career in the Royal Navy. He entered as a naval cadet on May 15th, 1904, passed through the Royal Naval Colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth, and went to sea as a midshipman in January, 1909. While serving as a midshipman Bob Sturges applied to be transferred to the Royal Marines. This was approved, and after a year as First Lieutenant in "River" class destroyers, he became a Probationary Lieutenant in the Royal Marines.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Sturges was serving as a subaltern in H.M.S. *Exmouth*. In this ship he took part in operations off the Belgian coast in November, 1914, being employed as spotting officer during the first attempts to destroy the Zeebrugge lock gates by bombardment from the sea. "We may not have hit the lock gates," said Sturges afterwards, "it was very difficult. But the Jerries in the Palace Hotel will have to go somewhere else for their breakfast to-morrow." This report was not appreciated by the Belgian pilot, who watched Zeebrugge, his home town, burning brightly as the ship steamed away in the twilight.

In the *Exmouth* Sturges went to the Dardanelles, where he often found himself aloft as spotting officer during bombardments. When reinforcements were called for ashore Sturges volunteered and landed at Cape Helles with the Deal, and later First Royal Marine Battalion of the Royal Naval (63rd) Division.

Sturges landed from the trawler "297." This little ship, which called at Anzac on the way to Helles, received some attention from

the Turkish field artillery which, after some "shorts" and "overs," straddled the ship. When she had steamed out of range Sturges asked the skipper what he made of it. His reply was: "I don't mind they shrapnel, but they 'igh explosions is bloody!"

On the Gallipoli Peninsular Sturges saw heavy fighting. He was then invalided and returned to England and joined the battleship *Monarch* in time to be present at the Battle of Jutland. In 1917 he served as Captain of Marines in H.M.S. *Isis* on Western Ocean convoy duty, and finished the war in H.M.S. *Iron Duke* under the command of Captain William Wordsworth Fisher.

Sturges's first ship after the war was the light cruiser *Cairo*, which did a very fast voyage out to Vladivostock. Soon afterwards Sturges was sent, in command of a detachment of Marines, up the Yangtse River to Ichang, where trouble was threatening and protection had to be given to British subjects and interests.

After the Marines had left it was decided that all white women should be evacuated from Ichang. These were nearly all amenable, but one, a very attractive woman, positively declined the offer of a passage down river. The British naval commander finally decided that he would have to take her against her will. The lady in question heard of this and retired to her bathroom, where she proceeded to have a bath. But the young sub-lieutenant sent to fetch her was not to be outdone. He and one of his men broke down the bathroom door and he carried the protesting lady down to the ship wrapped in her bath towel.

By 1923 Bob Sturges was back in England, and in that year he very nearly brought his career to an untimely end. He rode in a point-to-point steeplechase in a silk cap instead of a "crash helmet" and his horse came down heavily. It was a very bad fall and Sturges was in hospital and on sick leave for months. He himself never thought that he would recover.

Sturges is a great sportsman. Horses, dogs and shooting are his greatest joy. He has ridden in about a hundred and thirty-six races, and he will tell you with a grin that he has had about as many falls as first and seconds—some twenty-three and fifteen respectively. He always used to hunt with the Garth when at home, and it was he who started the Royal Marine Regimental Race Club, and he held a record for some time on the Kwanti course in Hong Kong by winning three steeplechases in one afternoon. When he was stationed in Malta in the early 1930's he was secretary of the Malta

Race Club, and he started the Maltese trotting races, largely as a means of restoring that club to a sound financial footing. When he was undergoing the course at the Royal Naval Staff College at Greenwich, the week's work used to end at 1 p.m. on Fridays. Sturges, by dint of saving seconds everywhere and adopting the slogan, on the road, "no reasonable risk refused," was able to take part in the military staff college drag hunts from Camberley on Friday afternoons! At Wei-hai-wei he managed to get over a hundred couple of snipe to his own gun in one season, no mean effort in that locality.

Sturges was back in China in 1926 and 1927, most of which he spent at Hong Kong and Wei-hai-wei. He spent part of one winter at Wei-hai-wei, where, with a change of wind, the temperature can drop as much as fifty degrees in a day, but he found the duck and goose shooting more than made up for the isolation and discomfort. At Wei-hai-wei Sturges secured the services of a Chinese "boy" who proved himself a most excellent servant. Unfortunately, however, the police began to take great interest in this "boy," as he was alleged to have murdered his late master in Chefoo. When Sturges tackled him on the subject the "boy" said blandly: "Oh yes—Chefoo master velly bad man. I cut throat, makee die. But I no murder you, master." The police would not accept this resolution, but the "boy" staged a sudden disappearance into the interior of China, and so escaped arrest.

From 1930 to 1932 Sturges, now a Major of Marines, served at Malta as Staff Officer, Intelligence. In this capacity he had to tour certain places in the Mediterranean. He was at Haifa when he was given the peculiar task of assisting to retrieve a young man from the French Foreign Legion.

The youngster in question had been a midshipman in H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth*. He had apparently been reading romantic novels and had been somewhat "ragged" in the gun-room, so had deserted and joined the French Foreign Legion in Syria.

Normally, death is the only possible release from the French Foreign Legion, but Sturges went to Beirut, and assisted the British Consul General with the problem of arranging for the young man's release. The latter had had more than enough of the Foreign Legion and most earnestly desired to return to sea. The negotiations were somewhat prolonged, and, not being a good French scholar, Sturges's part was largely confined to entertaining French officers

at "the local." The combined efforts of the Consul-General and Sturges were eventually successful, and the young man was duly released from the Foreign Legion. Sturges then went down to Beersheba to clear his head and shoot sand-grouse.

The beginning of this war found Bob Sturges a Brevet Colonel and Second-in-Command of the Royal Marine Depot at Deal.

In the spring of 1940 Sturges commanded the Royal Marines who effected the initial landings leading to the Allied occupation of Iceland. It was not an easy job. Apart from the fact that everything required by the force, except transport, had to be taken with it in the cruisers *Berwick* and *Glasgow*, there was no certainty whether the Allied landing would be welcomed, accepted as inevitable, or resented by the Icelanders. There were, of course, political ramifications which had to be taken into consideration. It was Sturges's first experience of commanding an armed force landing in territory where the reception of the landing force was a very doubtful quantity, although a friendly settlement was greatly to be desired. The greatest tact, and at the same time firmness and strict discipline were essential. On one occasion some drunken youths sang "Deutschland Uber Alles" outside the hotel which housed the force headquarters, whereupon a minority started bawling "God Save the King." Sturges, with great tact, had both teams put into the local "Black Maria" and taken to the police station.

In the event, the landings in Iceland were, on the whole, well received by the population and an amicable settlement was soon achieved. Looking back, it seems that the Iceland landings were, for Sturges, a sort of elementary introduction to the tasks which he was to be called upon to undertake two years later on the other side of the world. For his work in the occupation of Iceland Sturges was mentioned in despatches.

In about three weeks the Army took over from the Marines who had played such efficient "John the Baptists" to them in Iceland, and Sturges returned to Deal. That was in the dark days immediately following the withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk, when invasion seemed imminent and Britain's defences were improvised, almost literally, from ploughshares. It was a time which Sturges refers to as "the May Handicap."

In those days of Britain's great peril Sturges secured the command of a section of "the invasion coast" of south-east England,



Major-General R. G. Sturges

embracing Sandwich and St. Margaret's Bay. In that area Sturges, under the command of a London Division, collected and commanded as mixed a set of defences as even England has ever seen. There were two old 6-inch coast defence guns, detachments of Royal Marines, military details with very limited equipment, a Royal Marine Searchlight Battalion turned into infantry, Local Defence Volunteers, recruits and veterans, amateurs and professionals. All, however, were animated with the same spirit and forceful determination as Sturges—their aim was to achieve the maximum efficiency in defending the homeland in the least possible time. They were strenuous days and nights, with little rest for anyone, and least of all for the commander of a section of the south-east coast.

His command naturally suffered some casualties, but it brought down some Jerries and took some prisoners. One of the latter particularly irritated Bob Sturges. He was a young Bavarian who had had the impertinence to come and bomb England at about noon without having shaved.

The danger of invasion slowly receded, and in the autumn of 1940 another Royal Marine officer arrived at Deal to take over from Sturges. This officer arrived in a car which had recently undergone an expensive overhaul and was his pride and joy. It was duly parked under a tree and Sturges and his "relief" went into the mess for tea. During tea three Italian bombers visited the air over Deal. One of their bombs completely demolished the cherished motor car. Another slightly wounded Sturges with a splinter, since a somewhat heavily built officer impeded him in his dive to get under the table in the mess.

In November, 1940, Bob Sturges came to London, where he was engaged for some months in raising the Royal Marine Division and planning several amphibious operations which were projected, and in which the Royal Marines, as the "sea-soldiers," were designated the most important role of the initial assault. On May 8th, 1941, his command was made up to a division by the inclusion of an Independent Brigade and a battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

On December 23rd, 1941, Sturges first heard of the project to capture Diego Suarez, the great French naval base and fortress at the northern end of Madagascar. The working out of plans was started at once, Sturges handling the military side, while the naval

side was dealt with by Rear-Admiral T. B. Drew, O.B.E., R.N. Planning was not easy, for information about the objective and its approaches was scarce. At the request of the planning staff orders were given for photographic aerial reconnaissance of certain beaches to be carried out, the possibility that this might jeopardise the element of surprise having to be accepted. It was also arranged that a large-scale exercise should be carried out as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the operation.

Most of the preliminary work had been done, and it had been decided that the assault on Diego Suarez should take place early in April, 1942, when conditions of both moon and tide would be favourable to the landing operations. Then, in January, orders were received that the whole operation was to be held in abeyance.

The "dress rehearsal" exercise was, however, carried out at Sturges's request. As events proved, it was just as well that the preliminary planning and the practice exercise had been completed, for the assault on Diego Suarez, after having been once cancelled, was ordered at short notice. Sturges received orders to report to the War Office on the morning of March 14th, 1942. On his arrival there he was told that it had been decided at eleven o'clock on the previous night that the assault on Diego Suarez should take place during the favourable moon and tide period early in May. In order to do this the troop and supply convoy was to sail on March 23rd. The Twenty-ninth Independent Brigade, which was already embarked for an exercise, took the place of the Royal Marines.

Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret was nominated as the Combined Commander, while Major-General Sturges was to be the military force commander under him. Rear-Admiral Syfret was, however, abroad, and Sturges was told that it would not be possible to have any contact with him until the force arrived at Freetown, Sierra Leone. In the meantime, vital planning, including the arrangements for loading of the assault ships so that what was needed most urgently could be unloaded from them first, was done in conjunction with Captain G. W. A. Waller, R.N., who was to be Rear-Admiral Syfret's Chief of Staff for the operation, and Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams, D.S.C., R.N., who had acted as Chief of Staff to Rear-Admiral Drew during the preliminary planning three months before.

It was a rush to get everything ready in time, but the embarkation of stores and vehicles in the assault ships began on March 18th.

Although Sturges felt honoured at having been selected to command the land forces in so important an operation, he was very upset that the Royal Marine Brigades, who had been specially trained for combined operations of this sort and which had already suffered so many disappointments, had not been included in the force. He did, however, take his own Royal Marine Divisional Headquarters.

Sturges's job was far from easy in these initial stages. One is prone to think that a complicated amphibious operation can be "laid on" at short notice and with scant preparation. In fact the very reverse is true. The whole success of such an enterprise depends upon the forethought of those in charge. It was difficult for Sturges to anticipate all possible difficulties because he could not meet the naval commander until the operation was well under way. Moreover, two of the six assault ships were not to join the expedition until the arrival of the rest of the convoy at Durban. Nor was Sturges at that time concerned solely with the initial operation of capturing the fortress and naval base at Diego Suarez. Arrangements had to be made for its immediate consolidation after capture to guard against any sudden move by the Japanese, who were then known to be operating in force in the Indian Ocean.

On March 19th, Major-General Sturges had an interview with the Prime Minister, who wished him and his force "God speed." Two days later Sturges embarked in the *Winchester Castle*, where he set up his headquarters afloat. There followed two days of final arrangements, and the *Winchester Castle* sailed with the rest of the convoy on March 23rd.

Planning of the details of the initial assault and subsequent movements continued during the voyage out. What had been a music room in the *Winchester Castle* was sealed and became the planning room. To some it was known as the "Holy of Holies," and to others, even more irreverent, as "The Nut House." There every detail was checked and cross-checked by Sturges and Captain Garnons-Williams and their staffs, to make sure that nothing that could be foreseen should be left undone.

The convoy arrived at Freetown on April 6th, and stayed there for three days. There Major-General Sturges met Rear-Admiral Syfret and the units of another brigade for the first time, and throughout those three days the planning staffs were busy, as they were throughout the passage from Freetown to Durban. By the

time the expedition reached the latter port details had been settled and individual orders were ready for issue.

There was still much to be done, however. At Durban two more assault ships, with another brigade which met Sturges and his staff for the first time, joined the force. These ships had to be loaded, and meanwhile all the troops went on long route marches every day to harden the men and get them fit after their long voyage from England. Sturges, too, had many things to arrange with the South African authorities, and particularly with the South African Air Force under Colonel Melville, S.A.A.F., who commanded the air component of Marylands and Beaufighters laid on personally by Field Marshal Smuts. This South African Air Force component proved a tower of strength throughout. Finally the force, divided into two convoys, left Durban late in April.

At dusk on May 4th the two convoys joined forces off the north-western coast of Madagascar, and it was with some relief that Sturges realised that neither convoy had apparently been discovered by air reconnaissance or surface vessels. Nor was there any evidence of their having been sighted and reported by submarines. The entire force, naval and military, with its supplies, had been convoyed safely over the very long distance from England and had arrived at the right place at the appointed time without loss.

The large and well fortified harbour of Diego Suarez, somewhat similar to Scapa Flow, lies on the east coast of Madagascar some twelve miles south of its northern end. The harbour is approached through an entrance less than a mile wide between hilly promontories on which many coast defence batteries had been well sited. It is of interest that the defences of Diego Suarez were largely planned by Marshal Joffre when he was Governor of Madagascar. Inside the entrance, the harbour opens out into a stretch of water about ten miles wide from east to west and half as wide from north to south. Into the harbour jut two promontories. At the end of the most easterly of these lies the important village of Diego Suarez, and at the end of the southern promontory is the garrison and dockyard town of Antsirane, the capital of Northern Madagascar.

From the head of Diego Suarez harbour to the western shore of Madagascar is only about four miles as the crow flies, but the distance from the west coast to Diego Suarez is about eight miles, while that to Antsirane was seventeen miles by map but actually

twenty-three, a fact which had considerable effect upon subsequent events. The country is difficult, scrub-covered, and hilly. Some four miles south of Antsirane the track from the west coast—it can hardly be called a road—goes over a pass called the Col de Bonne Nouvelle. Between this pass and Antsirane two large forts—Fort Caimans and Fort Bellevue—straddle the neck of the peninsular on which Antsirane is built. These forts were linked by a strong trench system and anti-tank defences.

On the west coast of Madagascar, opposite to Diego Suarez harbour, are two big bays, guarded by off-lying islands. These bays, Courrier Bay and Ambararata Bay, had been selected as the landing places for the assault force.

When the convoys and their escorts arrived off Courrier Bay it was confirmed that the approaches to the bays were heavily mined. This made it necessary for considerable minesweeping to be carried out; it also restricted the movements of the assault ships and landing craft during the whole period while the force was being put ashore. The landings were, however, carried out according to plan and to the time-table which had been worked out. During the initial stages Major-General Sturges directed the military operation from Rear-Admiral Syfret's flagship, H.M.S. *Ramillies*.

The assault ships approached Courrier Bay and Ambararata Bay through the narrow channel between the off-lying reefs and uninhabited islands and anchored just inside the screen of islands so as to remain out of range of the coast defence guns in case these had not been silenced by daylight. The assault landing craft and motor landing craft were then manned and lowered from the ships. These left for the beaches at intervals between 2 a.m. and 3.20 a.m., being led in for some way by the corvettes and minesweepers.

No. 5 Commando and a detachment of the East Lancashire Regiment landed unopposed at Courrier Bay at 4.30 a.m. and by 5.15 they had captured the coast defence battery consisting of four modern 6.5-inch guns and known as Windsor Castle Battery. The French garrison of this post was found asleep and offered no resistance. Surprise had been complete.

One troop of No. 5 Commando was left at Windsor Castle as a garrison and for mopping up. The remainder of this force advanced across the isthmus and reached the village of Diego Suarez at 2.30 that afternoon, after having met with only slight opposition in

the early stages of their advance. They were, however, unable to find any boat in which to cross to Antsirane.

At Windsor Castle a machine-gun and some snipers came to life at daylight. The troops holding this area spent most of the day stalking these, but they were not finally mopped up until the following day.

Meanwhile landings had been effected in Ambararata Bay and the French had been deprived of almost all air power by the Fleet Air Arm, which had bombed the aerodrome south of Antsirane.

The main advance from Ambararata Bay began soon after daylight, led by the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and including the East Lancashire Regiment and the South Lancashire Regiment. For the first few hours no enemy were met, the only opposition to the landings having been from a machine-gun post manned by Senegalese troops. This post was quickly silenced.

At about 8.15 a.m. the force advancing from Ambararata Bay met and captured a French naval officer and three ratings. This officer was given a letter demanding the surrender of the naval base and sent back to Antsirane in his own car. This action was taken in order to conform with the instructions received from H.M. Government, which were to the effect that every opportunity was to be taken in addition to the dropping of leaflets which had already been done to warn the French authorities of our intentions. This policy was undoubtedly dictated with the object of preventing bloodshed. But its effect, from the military point of view, was unfortunate. The demand for surrender was refused and the ultimatum merely had the effect of giving warning of the approach of our forces towards Antsirane and of stiffening the French resistance.

At about eleven o'clock the column came under fire from the high ground about five miles south-west of Antsirane and were temporarily held up. While the infantry were deploying to attack the enemy positions on the high ground three tanks, the first to land, arrived and joined in the attack. They succeeded in silencing the enemy machine-gun and rifle positions on the high ground around the narrow and tortuous Col de Bonne Nouvelle. The tanks, which were reinforced by two more, continued to advance along the road towards Antsirane, but the extremely rough and rocky ground prevented them from leaving the road and clearing the surrounding country of the enemy. The five tanks got within

three miles of the centre of Antsirane, and then they came under heavy fire from 75-mm. guns firing down the road and from their right flank. Four of the tanks were put out of action. The remaining tank was sent back to report, while the crews of the disabled tanks stood their ground. They found it impossible to advance, but they beat off several enemy attacks and fought on until 3.45 p.m., when they were taken prisoner as even their revolver ammunition had been expended.

Meanwhile at the Col de Bonne Nouvelle the enemy defences came to life again as soon as the tanks had gone forward, and there held up our infantry, and it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that these enemy positions were finally mopped up. From about noon until three o'clock, therefore, there were two separate battles being fought on the Antsirane road. Just in front of the French main positions was the battle with the crews of the disabled tanks, while a mile and a half behind them our infantry was in action against the enemy's outpost line at the Col de Bonne Nouvelle. The initial dash forward of the tanks, although perhaps tactically unsound, did intercept and destroy the enemy's motorised infantry on their way to man their defence positions in the country, and thereby reduced the enemy's resistance at the well-sited and prepared intermediate positions.

At 3.15 the advance from the Col de Bonne Nouvelle was resumed. By this time seven more tanks had come up and these pressed forward to make contact with and locate the main French positions. These tanks were under the command of Captain P. L. Palmer of the Royal Hussars. Captain Palmer led his tanks off the road to the right and through the scrub and a mealie plantation to a hull-down position. Then he deliberately moved his own tank forward into the open to draw the enemy's fire. It was hit by a 75-mm. shell and Captain Palmer was killed while assisting his wounded driver to cover. The remaining tanks then resumed the advance, but were held up by heavy 75-mm. fire and finally withdrew at about 6 p.m. in the failing light.

By that evening Sturges had himself gone ashore and had made contact with several units. The situation with which he was faced that evening was quite reasonable. The majority of his troops had been active since they had manned their landing craft at 1.30 a.m., had marched eighteen miles in wet clothes and tropical heat along a bad and extremely dusty road, carrying or hauling in handcars

nearly all their ammunition and stores. For most of that march the so-called road ran through scrub which was burning fiercely in places as a result of shell-fire, and there was considerable interference from snipers. But the troops, although tired, had their tails well up, and both the G.O.C. and the Assault Brigade Commander had every reason to believe that a dawn attack would lead to a good scrap and breakfast in Antsirane.

The landing of troops, vehicles and supplies had been continued in Courrier and Ambararata Bays all day, but delays had been experienced owing to the inability of the ships to approach close to the landing beaches because of the many mines still unswept, and a strong north-east wind, which raised a considerable sea in the offing. As an instance of the difficulties which were encountered and overcome, the case may be quoted of men of a Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, who succeeded in manhandling guns and vehicles ashore although the men were working up to their necks in water.

Sturges, who had taken passage from Durban in H.M.S. *Ramillies*, Rear-Admiral Syfret's flagship, had intended to transfer by destroyer to H.M.S. *Keren*, one of the assault ships, which was designated as the headquarters ship, on the morning of the initial landings. Various factors, however, led to him remaining in the *Ramillies* until 12.30 that day. By that time the wind and sea had risen and these caused delays so that he did not reach the *Keren* until 3.30. On his arrival he went through all the information which had been received from the various landing parties, and then he went ashore himself, landing at the beach on the headland between Courrier and Ambararata Bays at 5 p.m. He had intended going direct to advanced headquarters, which were then in the Col de Bonne Nouvelle region, but the Bren carrier in which he started broke down, and other means of transport which he secured failed to reach the headquarters in the dark. No harm was done; however, for he was met by his staff officer with a comprehensive report on the situation existing. He then returned to the beaches and arranged for the support brigade which was then landing to push ahead in support of the first flight of troops. He returned to the *Keren*, whence he had good wireless communication with the *Ramillies*, the aircraft carriers, and the troops ashore. He went ashore again at daylight next morning—May 6th—and went straight to advanced Assault Brigade headquarters close to the approaches of Antsirane.

On the night of May 5th the situation was that the main assault

troops were facing the French line of defence across the isthmus leading to Antsirane. This position, which had not been disclosed by air photographs, consisted of a trench system flanked by the forts of Caimans and Bellevue. The defences were very strong, and the main approach road was further dominated by 75-mm. guns mounted in pillboxes.

It was decided that this position should be attacked at daylight by three battalions. On the extreme right the South Lancashire Regiment were to start before dawn to move through the broken country and mangrove swamps in order to get behind the enemy and turn his flank. The Royal Scots Fusiliers and the East Lancashire Regiment were to deliver a frontal attack at dawn.

The South Lancashire Regiment moved off to the east flank at two o'clock in the morning. And, on reaching the eastern edge of the isthmus they advanced northwards through the broken ground and mangrove swamp, skirting the shore.

Two companies of the battalion succeeded in working round the enemy's flank and reaching a position nearly three-quarters of a mile behind Fort Bellevue. Unfortunately, however, their only serviceable wireless set fell in the sea and they were not able to report their success in time for it to be fully exploited. Meanwhile the frontal attack on the enemy positions had been held up and our troops had suffered considerable casualties. Soon after daylight the enemy opened fire with 75's and mortars, and casualties began to mount up among our troops in the open on the exposed plateau area in front of the enemy positions. They were forced to withdraw in order to avoid further losses.

By that time Sturges had again come ashore, and had reached the advanced headquarters at 7 a.m. The situation he found was by no means a happy one. It was quite clear that the attack had failed and that the enemy was in great strength, while the British troops had suffered considerable loss both in men and equipment. Much of the loss of equipment had been caused by the fierce and rapidly spreading bush fires started by the French shell-fire.

Sturges sat down with his back to a tree to think things over, and nearly lost his life in the process. A sniper spotted him, but his bullet flew a few inches high and embedded itself in the tree trunk just above his head. That bullet was later dug out of the tree and kept by Sturges's driver, Corporal Dudman, Royal Marines.

Sturges realised that it was absolutely essential that his force

should be in Antsirane by the next day, for it would be difficult to maintain it in its present position with the limited transport available. Its lines of communication were precarious, consisting of eighteen miles of dusty track to the landing beaches, and troops were therefore far from fresh when they arrived in the forward areas.

As it was by this time clear that there was no wire, he decided on a silent night advance and assault by the support brigade, which was due to arrive in the front area by about 6 p.m., on the enemy positions between sunset and the time the full moon rose. He issued orders for this attack and for the landing of another brigade and then hurried back to Ambararata Bay and went off to H.M.S. *Ramillies*. There he arranged with Rear-Admiral Syfret for a destroyer to rush the harbour defences and land a party of Royal Marines at Antsirane, thereby creating a diversion in the enemy's rear at the time of the assault on his positions south of the town. So serious was the position ashore that Surges considered that this bold stroke was essential and would be justified even if the destroyer was lost, as seemed likely. He described it as a step "to take the enemy's eye off the ball." To quote Rear-Admiral Syfret: "it was a very begrimed General who came on board."

A detachment of fifty Royal Marines from H.M.S. *Ramillies* was accordingly embarked in the destroyer *Anthony*, and the ship sailed in order to reach the entrance to Diego Suarez harbour after dark. While entering the harbour H.M.S. *Anthony* came under heavy fire from the coast defence batteries, but she was not hit and pressed on, and laid herself alongside the quay of Antsirane to disembark the Marines. It would be difficult to overestimate the determination and skill with which this destroyer was handled.

While the Marines making this diversionary landing were capturing the French artillery headquarters and other nerve centres of the French defence system, the silent assault on the Fort Caimans—Fort Bellevue position by the support brigade and one company of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, was well carried out and successful. The defences were forced and resistance virtually collapsed except in the forts.

Major-General Sturges entered Antsirane soon after daylight on May 7th. The French trench system had been forced, but Fort Caimans and Fort Bellevue were still holding out. There were also

considerable French forces manning the batteries on the Orangea Peninsula, dominating the entrance to the harbour. Not having expected so rapid and complete a collapse of resistance, Sturges had already arranged for a naval bombardment of the Orangea positions. Thus the *Ramillies* opened fire with her 15-inch guns whilst negotiations for surrender were in progress. For a few uncomfortable minutes Sturges feared that the war was going to start all over again, but a signal got through rapidly and the *Ramillies* ceased fire. Though trying at the time, it is probable that the short bombardment did real good by assisting the French to make up their minds.

From purely military purposes Sturges then had to turn his attention to the far more complicated problems of diplomacy. The first difficulty was that, although Colonel Claerebout, the French officer commanding the defences of Diego Suarez, and Capitaine de Vaisseau Maertens, the French naval officer in charge, had surrendered in person, they had not done so in their official capacities. Elements which felt like continuing to resist were perfectly free to do so. The preliminary terms were therefore arranged between Sturges and Colonel Rouves, who was commanding the forces still fighting, and who proved himself a perfect gentleman throughout.

On May 8th, however, final terms of surrender were laid down and accepted at a conference presided over by Rear-Admiral Syfret.

There followed a period of consolidation which gave Sturges much hard work. The defences had to be put in order at short notice, as there was always the chance that the Japanese might try to capture Diego Suarez. There had been a great deal of sabotage, and essential parts of many of the coast defence guns were found to have been removed and buried. One of the triumphs of this period was the making of a breech block for a 6.5-inch gun by the military workshop staff and the artisans of H.M.S. *Ramillies*.

The question of following the capture of Diego Suarez by attacks at Majunga, Tamatave and other places, and an advance on Tananarive, the capital of Madagascar had already been discussed and planned, but on May 17th instructions were received from the Prime Minister that these operations were to be abandoned "for the present," as the troops, ships, and equipment were urgently required elsewhere.

Future operations in Madagascar were nevertheless discussed at conferences at Pretoria in June presided over by Field-Marshal

Smuts and attended by Major-General Sturges. In July Rear-Admiral W. G. Tennant, C.B., M.V.O., arrived by air with the news that he would be the naval commander in the event of further operations being carried out in Madagascar.

Late in July information was received from the War Office which showed that there was a probability of the delayed operation being authorised, and Sturges was told to fly to Mombasa for discussions of ways and means. He spent the next week in Mombasa and Nairobi planning the assault and discussing the terms of surrender which were to be presented to M. Annet, the French Governor-General of Madagascar. Then he flew back to Diego Suarez, turned over the command there to Major-General Smallwood, and returned by air to Mombasa for the detailed planning of the Majunga and Tamatave assaults.

The planning was made most difficult by the shortage of shipping and the difficulty of keeping our intentions secret. In order to achieve secrecy it was put about that the forces concerned were destined for India, and so well did this work that the General Officer Commanding was actually reported to the authorities for indiscreet conversation in the club regarding the movements of his troops to India!

The successful assault landings at Majunga finally took place on September 10th. At the same time a South African Brigade commenced their advance southward from Ambanja.

Almost simultaneously the island of Nossi Bé was assaulted and, after some casualties on both sides, was captured by South African troops and Royal Marines. This force was landed from the fast minelayer *Manxman*. Two days later H.M.S. *Manxman* transferred this force to the head of an estuary on the mainland. Here they landed, straddled the main road to Marmandia and prevented the retreat of the French who were opposing the South African advance from Ambanja.

Meanwhile a successful diversion was carried out at Morodavia by No. 5 Commando, landed from H.M.S. *Napier*, and was under the command of Commodore Arliss.

Previous to these operations the island of Mayotte had been captured on the personal initiative of Field Marshal Smuts. The landing of No. 5 Commando and detachments of Royal Marines was unopposed. In fact when the troops surrounded the Governor's compound with their tommy-guns at the "ready," they found the

half company of French colonial troops which formed the garrison drawn up to "present arms" in welcome acceptance of the occupation.

The organisation and timing of all these operations, and of the flying in to Majunga airfield of the components of the Fleet Air Arm, Royal Air Force and South African Air Force was the outcome of tireless planning.

An East African Brigade and South African armoured cars were then landed at Majunga and commenced the advance on the capital.

It was feared that the road would be blocked and the bridges, particularly those over the Komoro and Betsiboka rivers, be demolished.

The Komoro river, over fifty miles from Majunga, was reached at about four o'clock in the afternoon and the bridge was found to be intact and practically unguarded. Between the Komoro and Betsiboko rivers, however, there were many road blocks, and attempts to continue the advance by night without lights had to be abandoned. Early on September 11th the Betsiboko river was reached. It was found that all four cables of the suspension bridge had been cut, but that the bridge had fallen into the river so that, although the ends of the roadway for spans of about 100 feet had taken up a slope of about one in four, the centre part was level and only about two feet under water. After moving a girder which was obstructing the submerged roadway it was found possible to use the bridge in this condition. The French forces guarding the bridge, who were in position on the high ground five hundred yards from the far bank, were dislodged without much difficulty and the advance was continued.

By noon on September 13th orders were received that General Sir William Platt, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the East African Command, would assume direct command of the advance on the capital. On the same day Bob Sturges and Rear-Admiral "Bill" Tennant started in the cruiser *Birmingham*, with a brigade, tanks, and No. 5 Commando, for Tamatave, where the next assault took place on September 18th.

In an effort to save life the daylight assault on Tamatave was preceded by many wireless signals, and a boat was sent in flying a white flag. Unfortunately this was fired on and a short close-range naval bombardment of the enemy's field works was necessary. The white flag was then run up on shore and the assault took place as planned and without opposition.

Then, after seeing the white flag go up and his troops land safely over the beaches, Bob Sturges went down with malaria. He passed out completely in "Bill" Tennant's cabin in the *Birmingham* immediately after a conference on the bridge, going down suddenly just as if he had been poleaxed. The long strain had reduced his resistance to the fever. In the five months that Sturges was in Madagascar, in addition to getting the three initial assaulting brigades over the beaches he had got the fortress of Diego Suarez into working and defence order with practically no facilities. Next, he had landed one South African and one East African brigade, with all their supplies and stores, over beaches and a single ocean quay at Antsirane. Then he had carried out the assault landings with another brigade, with tanks and artillery, at Majunga and Tamatave, and had re-embarked three brigade groups, one of them three times. It had been a war of constant movement calling for tremendous concentration and organising ability, while political factors had always to be taken into account.

Sturges left Madagascar on October 18th, 1942, without any regrets, and reached England late in November. In January, 1943, he reassumed command of the Royal Marine Division.

SIR JOHN CRONYN TOVEY

G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O.

Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

EVER since the day, just before the outbreak of the present war, when the Royal Navy was mobilised at its war stations, the Home Fleet has been based in the far north.

Little has been heard of it, except in connection with the chase and destruction of the *Bismarck*. There were some references to its activity during the Norwegian campaign, and it has been hinted that the main body of the Home Fleet has been concerned from time to time in covering the passage of Anglo-American convoys to North Russia.

For the most part, however, the work of the Home Fleet, which is the corner-stone of the whole war potential of the United Nations, has been shrouded in mystery. That is inevitable. It would be difficult to think of information more eagerly sought by the enemy than the movements and dispositions of our main fleet.

Yet this enforced silence is often misunderstood. It is so easy for those who do not hold the ultimate responsibility to point to the fact that the fleet represents great power; a very large number of men; an instrument of warfare in which an immense amount of money has been invested; and to demand from it spectacular action of the type which, although it could not win the war in a few minutes, might well lose it.

It is remarkable that in a seafaring nation there should have been in our history so many instances of inability among landmen and politicians to appreciate the silent and secret work of those commanding the main fleet.

On November 20th, 1759, Lord Hawke achieved a decisive victory over the French at Quiberon Bay. That victory was the outcome of three long years in which Hawke had kept the sea with his fleet, yet, even as he was sailing into the battle at Quiberon Bay, his effigy was being burnt in the streets of London because he was considered to have failed to achieve anything spectacular. Yet Hawke had laid the spectre of foreign invasion of Britain.

Thirty-eight years later Duncan, with only two loyal ships of the line, the *Venerable* and the *Adamant*, and the frigate *Circe*, blockaded a Dutch fleet of ninety sail in the Texel, where 80,000 troops had been assembled for the invasion of England. His amazing feat was not fully appreciated at the time.

Lloyd George's memoirs show that in the war of 1914-1918 there was considerable dissatisfaction with the naval command for not employing the Grand Fleet on ostentatious sorties into narrow waters. Mr. Lloyd George and his supporters failed to appreciate that such a course would have been playing right into the enemy's hands. Even after its mauling at Jutland, the German Navy was strong enough to inflict a major defeat upon our scattered forces and convoys if it had been able to break out into the Atlantic. As it was, we were losing in 1917 more ships than we could afford—869,103 tons in April alone. Had losses on the scale which was to be expected if powerful surface squadrons gained the trade routes, been superimposed on the losses by U-boats, Britain would have been forced to sue for peace. The Grand Fleet, by its positioning and by its frequent sweeps at sea, stood always between the German Navy and the vital Atlantic trade routes.

In this war, too, there has been criticism, although the sortie of the *Bismarck* demonstrated the danger and underlined the chief duty of the Home Fleet in northern waters. One trembles to think what might have happened in the Atlantic or in the Indian Ocean if we had thrown away a few battleships in Trondheim Fiord before Germany had obtained control of the Atlantic coast of Europe from the North Cape to St. Jean de Luz, and before Italy and Japan had entered the war. Yet that was what was recommended.

Some people imagine that our naval commanders are timidly reluctant to risk the loss of heavy ships. That is misreading the problem with which they are faced. In war it is the policy of the weaker naval power to fight a war of attrition, hoping to achieve parity or even superiority through the losses inflicted on the initially more powerful navy. Therefore, to take risks which cannot be justified by the importance of the objective is to play the game of the enemy. The object of any commander of our main forces must be to retain sufficient force to be able to counter any move by the enemy, until such time as he may be able to fight and destroy the enemy's main fleet. When the enemy fleet has been destroyed he can lend an ear to other projects, but not before.



Admiral Sir John C. Tovey

It is seldom appreciated that the lot of the officers and men in the Home Fleet is an exceptionally hard one. They have none of the excitements and frequent actions of the light forces. They have to endure a brutal climate, and be for ever practising their art of war so that they shall one and all be at the peak of efficiency if, and when, the day comes for them to meet the enemy. Their opportunities for leave are few and far between, and made less by the inaccessibility of the northern bases of the fleet. They see their contemporaries in other ships gaining recognition, honours and awards, yet theirs is a part which seldom provides excitement or gains publicity. Hard work is their portion, and although this is universally recognised within the Naval Service, few people outside the Navy appreciate the degree to which the whole Allied cause rests upon this Home Fleet.

To maintain under such conditions a fleet manned by well over 25,000 officers and men, always at the highest pitch of efficiency, and with a keen and contented personnel, demands great leadership. Fortunately for civilisation, the Royal Navy has produced leaders capable of these feats—Jellicoe and Beatty in the last war—in this war, notably, Tovey.

Admiral Sir John Tovey—"Jack" Tovey, as he is known throughout the Royal Navy—has spent most of his naval career in destroyers. One would have said that he was essentially a "small ship" officer. It may seem strange, therefore, that he should have proved himself the ideal commander for the main fleet in home waters. There is no doubt, however, that service in small ships breeds not only dash, but a close association between officers and men from which springs great leadership.

That Tovey has dash and offensive spirit he demonstrated to the full during the Battle of Jutland. He was then commanding the destroyer *Onslow*, and it seems like a touch of poetic justice that another destroyer *Onslow* should have so distinguished herself when serving under Tovey as Commander-in-Chief, that her commanding officer—Captain Sherbrooke—should have been awarded the Victoria Cross.

At about five o'clock on the afternoon of May 31st, 1916, Admiral Evan-Thomas, commanding the four battleships, *Barham*, *Valiant*, *Malaya* and *Warspite*, found his ships heavily engaged with the German battle-cruisers and a formidable part of the German High Seas Fleet. It was that phase of the Battle of Jutland known in the

Navy as "Windy Corner." The situation was serious, as the battleships, already mauled as they turned the "corner," were unable to open the range. It was then that two destroyers of the Thirteenth Flotilla arrived on the scene. They had previously been engaged in screening the seaplane-carrier *Engadine*.

The destroyers were the *Onslow*, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander J. C. Tovey, and the *Moresby*. Without hesitation Tovey led in to the attack on the German heavy ships. Before the range was short enough to please Tovey, the two destroyers came under the heavy and concentrated fire of four German light cruisers—part of Hipper's light scouting group—which suddenly appeared out of the murk. The fire of these ships was so heavy and accurate that the destroyers were forced to turn away and abandon the attack, though the *Moresby* did succeed in firing one torpedo at long range. Meanwhile Admiral Evan-Thomas had successfully extricated his Fifth Battle Squadron and punished the enemy while so doing.

When, a little more than an hour later, Hipper turned to retire on the German High Seas Fleet, he found a British destroyer on either bow. To port was the *Onslow*, which was at that moment dashing in to finish off the crippled German cruiser *Weisbaden*. When, however, Tovey found himself on the port bow of the German battle-cruisers, he at once abandoned his attack on the *Weisbaden*—she was in any case incapable of movement—and turned to attack the far more tempting target provided by the German battle-cruisers.

Tovey gave the order to fire, and thought that all his torpedoes had left their tubes, but just as he gave the order the *Onslow* was hit amidships by a heavy shell, and the whole midship section of the ship was enveloped in clouds of steam. Thus only one torpedo was actually fired, and this missed. Heavily hit, and with her speed sadly reduced and threatening to fall off still more, the *Onslow* began to creep away. As she did so she passed close to the badly damaged *Weisbaden*. Tovey had just discovered that he still had three torpedoes. One of them he fired into the *Weisbaden*, hitting her fairly under the bridge.

At that moment Tovey sighted another tempting target. Five miles away a whole line of German battleships loomed out of the mist, steering towards the *Onslow* at high speed.

Of what happened then one can do no better than quote from

the official history: "He" (Tovey) "had two torpedoes still in his tubes, but his engines were failing, his speed was down to ten knots, and to turn to attack meant almost certain destruction, and yet he turned. One destroyer more or less, so he reasoned, mattered little, while two torpedoes fired from an ideal position might materially affect the action, and in this admirable spirit of devotion he decided to attack again. Making for the advancing battleship, he waited till his sights were on, and at 8000 yards fired his remaining torpedoes. Fair to cross the enemy's line they ran as he struggled away, but the Germans must have manœuvred to avoid them, for there was no hit. So bold an attack with a crippled ship deserved a better result."

Tovey was then faced with the problem of getting his crippled ship home across the North Sea. After struggling away from the scene of action, the *Onslow* fell in with another crippled destroyer—the *Defender*. The *Defender*, although badly damaged, could steam, and she took the *Onslow* in tow. The two ships arrived at Aberdeen two days later.

Lieutenant-Commander Tovey was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

It is interesting to trace the way in which Tovey's career, and the influence of people with whom he came in contact, combined to fit him for the supreme responsibility of commanding the main fleet of the British Empire in war.

One of the most outstanding personalities which influenced Tovey as a young officer was that famous officer, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson—"Tug" Wilson, as he was, and still is, universally known in the Royal Navy. Jack Tovey's first year at sea as a midshipman was spent as "doggie" to "Tug" Wilson. A "doggie" in the Navy is a midshipman who is selected as a personal assistant to a senior officer. He follows his senior about—hence the term—runs messages, does anything and everything that the great man may require, but all the time learns fast and at first hand.

Jack Tovey then went ashore to undergo the various courses to qualify for the rank of Lieutenant. When he was due to go to sea again, "Tug" Wilson asked for him to be appointed to his flagship, the *Exmouth*, as a watchkeeper. Sir Arthur Wilson was not a man to ask for a particular officer unless he saw in him the makings of a leader. Of his time in the *Exmouth* Tovey says: "The ship was full of outstanding officers such as Duff and Dreyer, and

in a year and a half there I learned more than I could have in two or three times that period anywhere else in peace time."

Another famous leader with whom Jack Tovey has been closely associated, and from whom he has drawn great inspiration, is Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham. Indeed, Tovey's career in the last twelve years has followed closely that of Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Tovey shares many of the attributes of that great Admiral, whom he so much admires.

When Italy entered the war in the summer of 1940 and the assistance of the French Fleet was denied to us, Tovey, then a Vice-Admiral, was Second-in-Command to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the Commander-in-Chief. As Second-in-Command in the Mediterranean, Tovey was also Vice-Admiral Commanding the Light Forces of the Mediterranean Fleet, a powerful force of cruisers and destroyers. His resolute handling of these forces in the engagement with the Italian main fleet off the Calabrian coast on July 9th, 1940, when Admiral Cunningham, with a fleet inferior in strength, adopted the most aggressive tactics, was undoubtedly a deciding factor in persuading the Italian fleet thenceforward to maintain a passive role.

Jack Tovey was born in 1885. His father was a Colonel in the Royal Engineers, and his mother was Canadian. He entered the *Britannia* as a cadet at the age of fourteen, and went to sea as a midshipman in 1901. In the war of 1914-18 Tovey was First Lieutenant of the first British warship to receive damage in action with the enemy. This was the light cruiser *Amphion*.

Since then Tovey has held many appointments which have given him wide experience in handling men, and in the strategic and tactical problems facing those who hold high command in time of war.

He has served twice at the Admiralty; as a Commander in the Operations Division of the Naval Staff; and as a Captain in the important appointment of Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Personnel.

Another shore appointment which Tovey held at about this time in his career was that of Assistant Director at the Tactical School. He served there for just on two years, and he says himself, "I learned an enormous amount from hearing the opinions of the many officers who passed through and in study of the problems we investigated." He has, in fact, made a very deep and comprehensive study of the problems of strategy and tactics, and the fact

that he has made a practice of giving thought and study to every problem which might arise has contributed largely to his ability to take instant decision and unhesitating action with quiet confidence.

His study of strategy and tactics has made him insistent on the vital need, so fully proved in this war, for full air co-operation and the provision of many more destroyers. He also has the fullest realisation of the importance of nursing both men and ships so that they maintain their efficiency unimpaired through the strain of a long war.

When he went back to sea he commanded one of the destroyer flotillas of the Home Fleet, and then H.M.S. *Rodney*, which was at that time the largest and most modern battleship in the fleet. Years later, as Commander-in-Chief, he was to lead the *Rodney* into action against the *Bismarck*.

Later, he was Commodore of the Royal Naval Barracks at Chatham for two and a half years. This appointment, in charge of one of the three great manning depots of the Royal Navy, afforded him a particularly good opportunity of dealing with the vital problem of manning the fleet during the early stages of the period of naval expansion, and gave him an insight into the many questions affecting training and welfare, which was to stand him in good stead later, when he had to deal with the training and welfare of the 25,000 men in his fleet under war conditions.

In 1938 Jack Tovey hoisted his flag as Rear-Admiral Commanding the Destroyer Flotillas of the Mediterranean Fleet. He immediately found himself dealing with a complicated and delicate international problem. Twice during the first year in which he held that appointment he acted as Senior British Naval Officer in Spanish waters during the Spanish Civil War. In this awkward situation Tovey displayed firmness and resource in the handling of the diverse diplomatic problems with which he was faced. Nor, during those difficult times, did he neglect the training of his flotillas, and the high state of efficiency to which he brought them was soon demonstrated by their achievements in war.

With Italy remaining neutral at the beginning of this war, the four flotillas of the Mediterranean Destroyer Command were withdrawn for service elsewhere. Then, in the summer of 1940, it became obvious that Italy intended to throw in her lot with Germany, and ships were hurried back to the Mediterranean, where

The *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* had been located in a fiord near Bergen when the weather shut down, and subsequent air reconnaissances proved futile. At that critical time, aircraft sent out found the visibility off the Norwegian coast practically nil, and finally, all reconnaissance flights had to be abandoned. The Royal Air Force was "grounded."

This state of affairs persisted for over twenty-four hours, and every minute of those hours added to the anxiety and difficulties of Admiral Tovey—the man who stood between the *Bismarck* and the possibility of terrible havoc among the merchant ships and escorts of our great Atlantic convoys.

Had the *Bismarck* sailed, or was she still in a Norwegian fiord? That was the question. If she had sailed soon after the last air reconnaissance had sighted her near Bergen she might be rapidly approaching one of the northern passages out into the Atlantic. If so, every minute that Tovey kept his ships in harbour might be facilitating the break-out into the Atlantic. On the other hand, if the ships of the Home Fleet were taken to sea on an extended searching sweep and the *Bismarck* was still snugly at anchor off Bergen, the searching sweep would not only be futile, it might result in the British ships being short of fuel at the moment the *Bismarck* made her dash.

Seldom has so heavy a responsibility, aggravated by such uncertainty, devolved upon a Commander-in-Chief.

Tovey considered the problem from every angle. He made certain dispositions of his cruiser squadrons and submarines to ensure that, so far as was humanly possible, he would have warning of an attempt to break through the cordon into the Atlantic; and he kept his main force ready "on a split yarn," but with full bunkers.

Soon after noon on May 23rd the Fleet Air Arm took a hand. The Fleet Air Arm is an integral part of the Navy. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was acutely aware of the problems confronting the naval Commander-in-Chief and of the vital importance of solving them, irrespective of such considerations as normal, or even abnormal flying conditions.

The problem was a naval one, which could only be solved by air. As such, it dominated the minds of those at the nearest Fleet Air Arm station—Hatston, in the Orkneys. The result was that, on the initiative of Captain H. L. St. J. Fancourt, R.N., commanding

the station, it was decided that a volunteer crew should brave the weather and take a naval reconnaissance aircraft across the North Sea to the Bergen area in a desperate attempt to solve the Commander-in-Chief's problem.

The aircraft chosen was an American-built Maryland. It was piloted by Lieutenant-Commander Noel Goddard, R.N.V.R., a very experienced pilot; he took with him as navigator and observer one of the most experienced observer officers of the Fleet Air Arm—Commander G. A. Rotherham, R.N. Rotherham was appointed as executive officer of the Hatston station, and flying was not then one of his duties. Two volunteer ratings made up the aircraft's crew.

With these two officers the Maryland took off from Hatston in the vilest possible weather. It "wave-hopped" all the way across the North Sea in visibility which could often be measured in feet rather than in yards. So accurate was Rotherham's navigation that the Maryland was in the mouth of the fiord which they were to search when the first land was sighted. The cloud was down almost to sea level. There could be no question of flying high and having a good look at the fiord. The only way to determine whether or not the *Bismarck* was still there was to fly round the fiord close to the steep mountains. This they did, and satisfied themselves that there was no large ship in the fiord in which the *Bismarck* had been anchored.

Many people would have thought that their mission was completed, but Rotherham was an experienced and efficient naval officer. He appreciated the Commander-in-Chief's problem and was not content with a partial solution. He considered that the *Bismarck* might have moved into Bergen harbour.

So the Maryland flew on up the fiords, and close over Bergen harbour at low altitude in the face of intense anti-aircraft fire.

There was no large ship in Bergen harbour.

Only then were the naval airmen satisfied. They withdrew from the fiords and again "wave-hopped" across the North Sea in what would be described as "Nil Visibility." Again they made a perfect landfall, and touched down at Hatston after one of the most important but most hazardous flights that has ever been made.

The *Bismarck* had sailed from her anchorage in the Bergen fiords, and with her the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. That was the all-important information brought back by the Maryland's crew.

To say that it lifted a great weight of uncertainty and anxiety from Admiral Tovey's mind would be an understatement.

He was quick to act upon it. Patrols in the Denmark Strait, in the Iceland-Faroes passage, in the Fair Island Channel, were reinforced. Far to the south-westward a high-speed force consisting of the battle-cruiser *Hood* and the new battleship *Prince of Wales* steered to the westward so as to be able to cover both a break-out into the Atlantic, and any attempt to carry out a raid in force upon Iceland. Tovey took his main fleet to sea, steering to cut the enemy off from the areas in which he could do most damage to the Allied cause, but at the same time conserving fuel for what might develop into a long chase.

Nor was the Admiralty idle. There were convoys in the Atlantic to be diverted out of harm's way. There were naval forces other than those under Admiral Tovey's direct command which might come in useful, either as covering forces to keep the ring, or to take part in the chase. Far to the westward the battleship *Ramillies* began to move in towards the ring. From the eastward came the battleship *Rodney*. Far away to the south, at Gibraltar, Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville's famous "Force H" raised steam. To the south-west a destroyer flotilla, under Captain P. L. Vian in the *Cossack*, covered the passage of a convoy and stood ready to take part in this gigantic operation. Farther south the cruiser *Dorsetshire*, which was with another convoy, did likewise. All these forces were eventually put under the command of Admiral Tovey—who has since paid tribute to the close co-operation of the Admiralty and the accuracy of the Admiralty's appreciations of the enemy's probable intentions and movements.

In the late evening of May 23rd the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* were again sighted. They were in the Denmark Strait, between Iceland and Greenland, and steering south-west, keeping close to the edge of the Greenland ice-pack.

The enemy was first sighted by the cruiser *Suffolk*, who was soon joined by her consort, the *Norfolk*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker. Upon these two ships devolved the task of shadowing the enemy and keeping touch with him under supremely difficult conditions.

On receiving the report that the enemy had been sighted, Admiral Tovey ordered Vice-Admiral Holland to press on with the *Hood* and *Prince of Wales* on a course which would intercept the

enemy early next morning. In order to maintain the necessary speed Admiral Holland had to leave his destroyers behind. Tovey himself increased speed.

Early on the morning of May 24th, Admiral Holland's force made contact with the enemy. The action was brief. Although the *Bismarck* was hit, she was not stopped. The great battle-cruiser *Hood* blew up and sank with her Admiral and all but three of her company. The battleship *Prince of Wales* was hit and damaged.

Seldom can a Commander-in-Chief have been faced with so great a strategic problem as that which confronted Tovey when he heard the tragic news of the loss of the *Hood* and the damage to the *Prince of Wales*. Here was proof of the immense power of the *Bismarck*, and of her speed and ability to take punishment as well as to inflict it. If the speed of the *Prince of Wales* was permanently reduced by the damage she had sustained, that and the loss of the *Hood* left him with only one capital ship capable of anything like the speed of the *Bismarck*. That was his own flagship, H.M.S. *King George V.*, and she was several hundred miles to the eastward of the *Bismarck*.

There seemed to be but one chance of stopping the great German ship—to throw in the Fleet Air Arm. Tovey had with him the aircraft carrier *Victorious*. She was a new ship, hardly fully worked up, and the Fleet Air Arm Squadrons which she carried were newly formed and could not be expected to have reached full efficiency. To send these squadrons against the *Bismarck* in their first operation seemed almost foolhardy, but there was no doubt of the courage and determination of the air crews, and the only chance of slowing up the enemy so that he could be brought to action seemed to lie in sending them to attack.

Admiral Tovey accordingly ordered the *Victorious* to close the enemy at full speed and deliver a torpedo bomber attack at the earliest possible moment. Meanwhile, he himself altered course to the south-westward—a course more suited to his intentions of cutting off the enemy on his southward run. Admiral Wake-Walker, with the cruisers *Norfolk* and *Suffolk*, and with the damaged *Prince of Wales* in support, was hanging doggedly on to the *Bismarck's* heels.

Admiral Somerville left Gibraltar with the battle-cruiser *Renown*, the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, and the cruiser *Sheffield*, and steamed north-westwards. The battleship *Rodney* altered course

to the south-west to converge upon the *Bismarck's* southerly course.

That evening, there was another brief engagement between the *Bismarck* and the *Prince of Wales*, but it was inconclusive and soon broken off by the *Bismarck*. At midnight, at which time it was still not dark in those northern latitudes, the attack by the torpedo bombers from the *Victorious* developed. The aircraft had had to be flown off while the *Victorious* was still more than a hundred miles away from the *Bismarck*, in order that the attack should develop before darkness fell.

Despite the long flight from the carrier, in far from ideal weather, the aircraft found the fast-moving *Bismarck* and attacked, hitting the German battleship with one torpedo. The aircraft then had to try to regain their aircraft carrier in the dark. They knew that she would have moved many miles since they left her, and that she could not tell them of her movements nor "home" them on her by wireless, for the use of wireless would have given the enemy information of the carrier's position. Some aircraft did not return to the *Victorious*, and one air crew was picked up later by a merchant ship. They had crashed near an empty ship's lifeboat—grim evidence of the inexorable Battle of the Atlantic—and had taken possession of it.

This air attack was led by Lieutenant-Commander E. Esmonde. For that attack he was awarded the D.S.C. Nine months later he was posthumously awarded the V.C. for leading the Fleet Air Arm attack on the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* during their dash from Brest to Germany—the attack in which he and so many of his fellows lost their lives.

Although the *Bismarck* was certainly hit, she continued on her southerly course as if unharmed. Imagine the feelings of the Commander-in-Chief. The *Hood* had been lost and the *Prince of Wales* damaged; he had shot what seemed to be his last remaining bolt, and still the *Bismarck* went on. Tovey, however, is the last man to accept defeat. He is a realist, and, as such, the bright side of a situation is just as apparent to him as the dark side. One side was certainly dark enough, but there was much on the bright side—Admiral Wake-Walker in the *Norfolk*, with the *Suffolk* and *Prince of Wales* in company, was still shadowing the *Bismarck* and keeping his Commander-in-Chief informed of the enemy's every move. There was the possibility that aircraft from the *Victorious* could strike again at dawn. And up from the south was coming Admiral

Somerville, who had with him the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, carrying some of the most experienced Fleet Air Arm Squadrons in the Royal Navy.

Then, soon after three o'clock in the morning, the Commander-in-Chief received even worse news. Admiral Wake-Walker's force, which had shadowed the enemy for a night and a day and half a night, defying all attempts to shake or fight them off, had lost touch with the *Bismarck*.

Tovey's mouth set in a thin grim line as he gave orders for certain ships to search certain sectors, and for the aircraft of the *Victorious* to abandon thought of dawn attack and to carry out extensive searches instead. He himself continued to the south-eastward at high speed, believing that although all the cards seemed to be going against him, he would at last succeed in bringing the *Bismarck* to action and sink her.

It was not until 10.30 on the following morning, thirty-one hours after touch had been lost, that the *Bismarck* was again sighted—this time by a searching Catalina flying boat of the Royal Air Force Coastal Command. During the whole of those thirty-one hours Admiral Tovey had borne an immense weight of responsibility, made heavier by his uncertainty. In this unenviable situation he had been given much help by the co-operation of the Admiralty and of the headquarters of the Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force. With their help a very wide net of search had been cast, both with ships and with aircraft. Anxiety had persisted, because the meshes of the net were not small enough to guard against an escape by the *Bismarck* during dark hours or a period of low visibility, but certainly nothing had been left undone.

The Catalina broke out of cloud cover unexpectedly, got too close, was almost shot down, and lost touch with the *Bismarck*; but the German ship was picked up within three-quarters of an hour by naval reconnaissance aircraft from the *Ark Royal*, which was with Admiral Somerville's "Force H."

Admiral Somerville at once detached his only cruiser, the *Sheffield*, to make contact with the *Bismarck* and shadow her. During the afternoon he also flew off a torpedo striking force from the *Ark Royal* to attack the *Bismarck*.

Tovey had high hopes of this attack, but again he was disappointed. The attack was abortive, owing to some confusion between

the *Sheffield* and the *Bismarck* in the bad weather and low visibility.

At this time Admiral Tovey in the *King George V.* was hurrying southwards at full speed, and in his vicinity was H.M.S. *Rodney*, her boiler-room and engine-room personnel performing prodigious feats in an effort to drive their ship faster than her designed speed in order to join the Commander-in-Chief.

Twenty minutes after the failure of the first attack by Swordfish torpedo-carrying aircraft from the *Ark Royal*, a second striking force was flown off from that carrier. The weather conditions were appalling for operating aircraft from a carrier. Spray was sweeping over the flight deck. Stationary aircraft slid bodily across the deck. The after end of the deck was rising and falling fifty-six feet; yet the striking force took off, attacked, and got back to the aircraft carrier, although one of the aircraft had both pilot and gunner wounded and 175 shot holes in its fabric.

The aircraft reported torpedo hits on the *Bismarck*, and soon reports of shadowers showed that the great ship had at last been crippled. Her speed had been reduced to 8-10 knots and she was clearly unable to steer, so that her bows went up into the wind, which was blowing from the north-north-west—a direction which certainly did not carry her towards the sanctuary of one of the Biscay ports.

During that night Captain Vian's destroyers—*Cossack*, *Zulu*, *Maori* and *Sikh* and the Polish destroyer *Piorun*, came on the scene. They kept the *Bismarck* fixed, and attacked with torpedoes whenever opportunity offered. Some hits were certainly scored, but the *Bismarck*, for all the damage to her steering gear and her loss of speed, was still a force to reckon with. Her gunfire was both heavy and accurate.

Admiral Tovey had now been joined by the *Rodney*, and he proposed to close in upon the *Bismarck* at daylight and finish her off. This action was postponed, however, as the visibility at daylight left much to be desired. But as soon as the weather cleared he closed the *Bismarck*, and before long the pride of the German Navy was being subjected to the concentrated fire of the *King George V.*'s 14-inch guns and the *Rodney*'s 16-inch guns. The return fire of the *Bismarck*'s 15-inch guns was, to begin with, accurate, but its accuracy soon fell away when the *Bismarck* began to take the terrific punishment meted out by the British guns.

It was before the German gunnery became ragged, and while

the *King George V.* was under heavy and accurate fire, that Admiral Tovey, on the bridge of the *King George V.* kept saying: "Close the range! Get closer! I can't see enough hits." It was the modern equivalent of Nelson's habitual order: "Engage the enemy more closely."

After a hammering by the British guns which reduced the *Bismarck* to a shapeless and burning hulk, without a single gun left in action, Admiral Tovey broke off the gun action and ordered the cruiser *Dorsetshire* to sink her with torpedoes. This the *Dorsetshire* duly did, and thus ended the career of a most dangerous enemy, within a few days of her daring the open sea.

The uncertainty, the long chase, the search, and the fickleness of fortune, had imposed a great strain upon the British Commander-in-Chief, but he gave inkling of it only once. That was just after the *Bismarck* had been accounted for. The Captain of the *Rodney*, having seen the *Bismarck's* shells fall close to the *King George V.*, ventured to signal to the Commander-in-Chief a hope that the flagship had suffered no casualties. Admiral Tovey signalled back that nobody had been hurt, although he himself had nearly become a casualty when he thought that the *Bismarck* was likely to escape.

That is an example of the dry humour of "Jack" Tovey. Certainly he did not spare himself during those hectic days and nights, but he preserved throughout that prolonged strain a sense of proportion and of grand strategy which buoyed him up in the face of adversity.

At the age of fifty-eight, Admiral Tovey's fair hair has gone grey. He is of middle height, stocky, and thick-set, with a mouth that can set in tight grim lines, but which alters completely when his face lights up as he smiles. He is a powerful man and has been a good games player and a golfer of mark. His youthful vigour and powers of endurance certainly belie his years.

After the action—a chase which had extended over more than 1750 miles of sea and had resulted in the cornering and destruction of the most powerful warship afloat—Admiral Tovey was made a K.B.E. He had been made a K.C.B. in the New Year Honours of the same year, but had been unable to get away from his fleet for long enough to visit Buckingham Palace to receive the accolade. At the time of the *Bismarck* action, therefore, he was styled Vice-Admiral John C. Tovey, K.C.B., D.S.O., without the title "Sir," which is conferred by the accolade from the King and not by the gazetting of the honour. Since, however, there seemed little like-

likelihood of Admiral Tovey being able to attend an investiture in London, he was granted, on June 10th, 1941, a Royal Warrant entitling him to the dignity and privileges of a K.C.B. It was not until 10th August, 1941, that Admiral Tovey received the accolade from the King. The ceremony took place in the Commander-in-Chief's cabin in H.M.S. *King George V.* during the King's visit to the fleet.

On October 14th, 1941, Tovey was made a K.B.E. The insignia of this order was presented to him by the King when he visited the fleet again on June 8th, 1942.

On April 12th, 1943, Admiral Tovey was made a G.C.B.

Admiral Tovey has now relinquished the command of the Home Fleet and became Commander-in-Chief at the Nore.

SIR PHILIP LOUIS VIAN

K.B.E., D.S.O.

Rear-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

"To beget surprise you need imagination to breed with audacity." That was one of the many famous epigrams coined by the late Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher.

Philip Vian's record in the war is such that one might think that he had taken Lord Fisher's maxim as his personal motto. No commander of surface ships has had so many or such varied encounters with the enemy, and in all of them audacity and imagination combined to surprise the enemy, confuse him, and lead to his defeat.

At the end of the war of 1914-18, Vian, then a junior Lieutenant, specialised in gunnery. By the middle of the 1930's, however, his career was beginning to veer away from the big guns of heavy ships, and he became a destroyer commander. His first command was a destroyer, H.M.S. *Active*, which he held from the spring of 1933 to the beginning of 1935. Since then, except for two short periods when he was attending the Senior Officers' Technical Course and the Senior Officers' War Course, he has served exclusively in "light forces." Before the war his largest command was the light cruiser *Arethusa*. Apart from that command, he commanded destroyer flotillas from October, 1935, until he hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *Nigeria* in command of a cruiser squadron in 1941—and even then his command consisted of "light forces."

It has been said that this is a "destroyer's war." Certainly the "light forces" have had more than their share of action and have borne magnificently the brunt of the struggle, usually under supremely difficult conditions. As the Captain of a destroyer flotilla, Vian exploited to the full every opportunity of inflicting loss and damage upon the enemy. His name, and that of his ship, H.M.S. *Cossack*, quickly came to be feared by the enemy and regarded with something akin to reverence by those fighting for freedom.

Vian's first great achievement was the rescue of 300 British

merchant seamen who were being taken to captivity in Germany by the armed German naval tanker *Altmark*.

The *Altmark* had been the quarry of British naval patrols for two months—ever since the defeat of the “pocket battleship” *Admiral Graf Spee* off the estuary of the River Plate on December 13th, 1939. When the *Admiral Graf Spee* fled into the neutral harbour of Montevideo, she landed certain British prisoners. These were the officers of seven British merchant ships which had been sunk by the *Admiral Graf Spee* during her raiding career in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean. These officers reported that their crews were held prisoner in a large armed tanker and supply ship named the *Altmark*, which had attended upon the *Admiral Graf Spee* from time to time. Some of these officers had been prisoners in the *Altmark*, and they testified that grievous hardship and severities were inflicted upon the prisoners in that ship.

Search for the *Altmark* was made far and wide, but the ship seemed to have vanished. Then, on February 15th, it was reported that a ship answering to her description was moving down the Norwegian coast, keeping inside the off-lying Norwegian islands, and navigating through the inshore channel known as the Inner Leads.

It had been suspected for some time that German ships were using this corridor of sheltered neutral water to creep past the flank of our North Sea patrol, relying upon Germany's ability to bully neutral Norway into acquiescence in this practice.

In the words of the communique issued by the British Admiralty at the time: “Certain of H.M. ships which were conveniently disposed were set in motion and certain aircraft reconnaissances were made, as a result of which a vessel bearing the name of the *Altmark* and conforming in every respect to her description yesterday afternoon took refuge in the Norwegian fiord of Josing, after having been sighted by coastal reconnaissance aircraft and intercepted by H.M.S. *Intrepid* (Commander R. C. Gordon, R.N.)”

It was on the afternoon of February 16th that the *Altmark* took refuge in Josing Fiord. This is a small fiord with but one outlet, and at that time of year its inward end was still covered in pack ice. The *Altmark* drove herself into this ice so that she became wedged and there was no need for her to anchor.

Commander Gordon of the *Intrepid* at once reported to the senior officer, Captain Vian, and asked for instructions. Was he

to risk provoking an international incident with a neutral country by following the *Altmark* into the fiord? He could not be absolutely certain that the ship *was* the *Altmark*. The ship certainly bore that name and resembled in every detail the description of her given by those who had been prisoners in the *Admiral Graf Spee*, but a guileful enemy might have disguised a ship with the intention of provoking an international incident between Great Britain and Norway. Germany was waging war against British maritime trade, and she knew well enough the importance of the great Norwegian mercantile marine in such warfare. Moreover, Norwegian merchant ships had been infuriating the Germans by disregarding their instructions to keep clear of Britain and of British convoys. If the ship *was* the *Altmark* the Germans must have felt very safe to keep her name painted so boldly on her sides. Commander Gordon felt, rightly, that he would not be justified in entering Norwegian territorial waters without specific instructions. At the same time, he patrolled off the entrance to Josing Fiord, blockading the *Altmark* in her icebound retreat.

Knowing that there was no chance of the *Altmark* escaping, Captain Vian referred to the Admiralty. The Admiralty, under the leadership of Mr. Winston Churchill, who was then First Lord, was quick to act. It was clear that International Law had been broken by the Germans in their attempt to take an armed ship carrying prisoners through neutral territorial waters. That Germany should convey prisoners to captivity through neutral waters was clearly intolerable. Any technical breach of International Law involved in entering neutral waters to liberate the prisoners was a small matter, for which the responsibility would in any case rest with Germany for perpetrating the initial and far more serious breach.

Captain Vian in H.M.S. *Cossack*, who had joined the *Intrepid* off the entrance to Josing Fiord, was accordingly ordered by the Admiralty, with the full authority of the British Government, to enter Norwegian territorial waters, search the *Altmark*, and liberate any British prisoners found.

Certain formalities were, however, to be observed. Two Norwegian gunboats had appeared at the mouth of Josing Fiord, and Captain Vian was instructed to approach the senior Norwegian naval officer and propose that a joint British and Norwegian guard should be placed on board the *Altmark*, and that she should then be escorted by British and Norwegian warships to Bergen, the

nearest port where a proper search of the ship could be carried out, and the whole matter investigated in accordance with International Law.

This offer was not accepted by the Commanding Officer of the Norwegian gunboat *Kjell*, who was the senior Norwegian officer present. The Norwegian captain said that the German ship had been examined at Bergen on the previous day, that she was unarmed, and had received permission to use Norwegian territorial waters on her passage to Germany. He went on to say that he had no knowledge of any prisoners on board.

In justice to the Norwegian captain it must be stated that he was in a very awkward predicament. The British force on the spot was far stronger than any armed Germans who might be on board the *Altmark*, even if that ship mounted concealed guns, but he was well aware that Germany was truculent and ruthless in her dealings with neutrals, and his country was uncomfortably closer to Germany than to Great Britain. Moreover, evidence which came to light later tends to show that his assurances were given in good faith.

One of the *Altmark's* officers, when interrogated, stated that the ship had, in fact, been twice visited by the Norwegian authorities in Bergen on the previous day. The German word he used was "besucht," which means, literally, "visited." At the same time he stated that on neither of these occasions had the ship been "untersucht," which means "searched." British prisoners released from the *Altmark* stated that during the visits by the Norwegians, and even when another ship passed near the *Altmark*, the Germans kept the ship's winches working at full pressure, making such a clatter as to drown any sounds from the prisoners, who were endeavouring to make themselves heard and their presence known to the neutral authorities.

Captain Vian withdrew outside territorial waters and made a further signal to the Admiralty, reporting the assurances given by the captain of the Norwegian gunboat.

After dark, on receipt of further orders from the Admiralty, making it clear that the British Government did not accept the Norwegian assurances, H.M.S. *Cossack* entered the fiord.

Captain Vian went on board the Norwegian gunboat *Kjell* and again suggested that the *Altmark* should be taken to Bergen under joint Anglo-Norwegian naval escort and with British and Norwegian armed guards on board. Again the offer was rejected.

The Norwegian captain made it clear that he was acting in accordance with his Government's instructions in refusing the British proposal and said that he had been ordered by his Government to torpedo any British warship which attempted to enter the fiord. Captain Vian advised him to ignore this order and plead *force majeure*, and this he did. He again assured Vian that there could be no British prisoners on board the *Altmark*, since the ship had been examined at Bergen. Vian asked that this assurance should be put to the proof, and invited the Norwegian captain to take a boarding party from the *Cossack* to the *Altmark* and accompany them during their search of the German ship.

In the conversation which followed Captain Vian made it very clear that he and the British Government were convinced that there were British prisoners concealed in the *Altmark*, and said: "I have orders to fetch these British citizens with or without the permission of the Norwegian Government." Finally the Norwegian officer consented to take passage up the fiord in the *Cossack* and to accompany the British boarding officer to the *Altmark*.

While these conversations were taking place, the *Altmark* had been working her engines, and as the *Cossack* approached her she broke clear of the ice and attempted to ram the *Cossack* or force her on to the rocks. It should be remembered that this happened at night, in very narrow waters with which Captain Vian was unfamiliar. By skilful seamanship he avoided the German ship's attempt to ram or drive the *Cossack* ashore, and laid his ship alongside the *Altmark*, grappling the starboard side of the big German tanker. As a result, the captain of the *Altmark* not only failed to damage the *Cossack*, but he ran the stern of his own ship on the rocks.

The position of the *Cossack* as she grappled with the German ship was difficult and dangerous. The fiord offered no room to manoeuvre, and the Germans could look down from their ship on to the destroyer's decks and gun positions. But the *Cossack's* boarding parties were so quick that the Germans had little time to act. They probably never imagined that the Royal Navy would resort to the tactics of the old days of sail, as practised before Germany had either tradition or navy.

One of the boarding parties, led by the First Lieutenant and other officers of the *Cossack*, sprang up to the bridge of the *Altmark*, where they thrust the German captain away from the engine-room

telegraphs and steering control of the ship. A second boarding party, led by Mr. J. J. Smith, gunner, began to search the accommodation and alleyways of the German ship. Firing broke out almost immediately, and Mr. Smith fell in one of the alleyways, seriously wounded. The *Cossack's* men fired only a few shots before the *Altmark's* crew was assembled at the after end of their ship, apparently cowed and submissive. Then the search for the prisoners began. It was not protracted. There came shouts from below—English voices. A British seaman battered on a closed hatch, and the shouting from below redoubled. Thereupon the British seamen yelled a phrase which has already passed into history—"The Navy is here."

The hatch was soon opened, and British merchant seamen, captive for long months under inhuman conditions, climbed out of their foul prisons and over to the *Cossack*. Many had to be helped. They were weak after their long captivity. They were found locked in store-rooms and shell-rooms—compartments with racks in which the 11-inch shells for the *Admiral Graf Spee* had been stowed—and even in an empty oil tank. None of these compartments was fit for the incarceration of prisoners of war, and the treatment meted out to the prisoners had been of the type which the world has now learnt to expect from Nazi Germany.

While the prisoners were being rescued and transferred to the *Cossack*, some German naval ratings, who had formed part of the prison guard put on board the *Altmark* by the *Admiral Graf Spee*, clambered over the stern of the ship. They made their way across the ice to the shore and, taking cover among the rocks, opened fire with rifles. The British returned this fire with small arms, and two more German naval ratings who were scrambling across the ice to join their fellows were hit. According to German statements, four Germans were killed and five seriously wounded by the British fire.

That these men brought their fate upon themselves, and that the intention of the Captain and company of the *Cossack* was solely to rescue the British prisoners and not to kill Germans in neutral waters, was demonstrated by an incident which occurred while the *Cossack* was alongside the *Altmark*. A German fell into the water amid broken pack ice; regardless of the cold or the danger of being crushed by the ice, two officers of H.M.S. *Cossack* plunged into the water and saved him. Nor did the *Cossack* take any German

prisoners, although it was clear that there were German naval ratings and reserve officers on board. Captain Vian was content with the rescue of the British prisoners, and once these had all been transferred to the *Cossack*, he cast off from the *Altmark* and left the fiord, sending the Norwegian captain back to the *Kjell* at the entrance to the fiord.

During the afternoon, while the *Altmark* case was being argued with the Norwegians close inshore, one of the supporting force, H.M.S. *Ivanhoe*, commanded by Commander P. H. Hadow, R.N., sighted the German tanker *Baldur* passing outside Norwegian territorial waters. She was summoned to stop, whereupon her crew scuttled the vessel and abandoned her. They were rescued by the *Ivanhoe*.

The British ships returned across the North Sea without incident, and during their voyage Captain Vian received the following characteristic signal from Mr. Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty: "The force under your orders is to be congratulated on having in a single day achieved a double rescue, Britons from captivity and Germans from drowning."

The *Altmark* "incident" became the favourite topic of the German Propaganda Ministry, but 300 British merchant seamen had been rescued from German prison camps. As for the *Altmark*, the damage which she sustained in running her stern on the rocks robbed Germany of her use for some time.

It was not long before Captain Vian was again in action against the Germans in Norwegian waters. On April 9th, 1940, Germany invaded Norway. It was an invasion carried out by stealth and treachery. Hordes of armed Nazis swarmed ashore from ostensibly peaceful merchant ships and fishing vessels and took virtually defenceless ports by surprise.

Things happened quickly. On April 9th, Oslo was occupied by the Germans. On April 11th, the Germans took possession of Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim. On April 15th, the first British troops landed in Norway—quick work when one considers the organisation required, the collecting of troops, equipment and ships and the long voyage across the northern part of the North Sea.

The British troops landed at several places in Norway. Perhaps the most important of these landings was at Namsos, sixty miles or so north of Trondheim.

The naval responsibility at Namsos devolved upon Captain Vian in H.M.S. *Afridi*, sister ship of the *Cossack*. Vian was in charge of the landing of troops and stores. The Army was in charge of the famous one-armed General, Carton de Wiart, who afterwards played so important a part in negotiating the surrender of Italy, and he established his military headquarters afloat in H.M.S. *Afridi* during the landings.

For more than a fortnight the Navy held the fiords, succouring the troops ashore, but suffering grievous losses through the incessant bombing attacks of the German air force. Neither ships nor troops had any fighter protection at Namsos, and they were a bare sixty miles from the airfields at Trondheim, which had been transformed into a great base for the Luftwaffe. The town of Namsos was laid in ashes by high explosive and incendiary bombs. Troops, fighting valiantly against the Germans advancing in superior numbers, found their supplies destroyed after having been brought across the North Sea and landed by the Royal Navy. Ships in the fiords found insufficient sea room to take avoiding action during the bombing attacks.

Gradually it became clear that any attempt to hold on at Namsos with the force available and without fighter aircraft would be suicidal, and it was decided to withdraw.

In this task also, Captain Vian played a vital part. On the night of May 2nd—seventeen days after the initial British landings in Norway—the last of the Allied troops were re-embarked at Namsos, being ferried from the lurid quays of the still burning town to the off-lying transports by trawlers and other small units of the Royal Navy.

The final convoy, carrying men who had been fighting without a break for many days and nights, was organised by the men of the Navy, who had themselves come to regard moments of rest as a welcome and most infrequent change from the constant dodging of "pennies from heaven," as the trawler-men called the German bombs. Soldiers and sailors—British, French and Polish, who had leapt at a chance of hitting back at the enemy in the Norwegian campaign, had to accept tragedy and evacuate from the fiords.

Re-embarkation of the troops was no easy matter. There was little of Namsos or its jetties left, and the whole scene was made lurid by a burning ammunition dump. At length, however, the over-tired but still reluctant troops were ferried by the trawlers

and other small craft to the off-lying transports, and at last the convoy sailed.

Vian was in charge of the escorts of that convoy. He knew, as they all knew, that there was no possibility of air fighter cover being available to the convoy. The ships would be wholly dependent upon their own guns. Moreover, there was every reason to believe that the Luftwaffe would go "all out" to destroy the big troop convoy on its way back across the North Sea.

The convoy left the fiords under cover of night and tried to make as much offing as possible during the dark hours. Captain Vian was hoping for thick weather, but the sky remained clear, with the crystal-clear visibility of May in those latitudes. Soon after daylight on May 3rd the convoy was seen, reported and shadowed by German reconnaissance aircraft. Vian had no means of dealing with shadowing aircraft which remained in sight but out of range of his guns. He had no fighters to send into the air to drive them off. All he could do was watch and wait for the heavy air attacks the shadower promised by its presence, and at the same time keep a wary lookout for U-boats.

He did not have to wait long. Soon the Luftwaffe was attacking in waves of dozens of aircraft.

The first ship to be hit was the French destroyer *Bison*. H.M.S. *Afridi* and another British destroyer went at once to take off her survivors, since it was obvious that the ship could not be saved. When the *Afridi* and the other British destroyer went alongside the crippled *Bison* to rescue her crew, the French destroyer's depth charges were on fire. There seemed imminent danger of them exploding and destroying the two British destroyers as well as finishing off the *Bison*. The Frenchmen were, however, saved from their burning ship.

Then the Polish destroyer *Grom* was hit, and she also became a total loss. The German aircraft appeared by this time to have realised that they were unlikely to be able to carry out accurate attacks on the ships in convoy unless they first quelled the terrific barrage put up by the escorts. This they could only do by sinking the escort ships first, and the Germans accordingly made the destroyers the main targets for their attacks.

In the afternoon H.M.S. *Afridi* was hit amidships by a heavy bomb. She was still astern of the convoy, catching up after her part in rescuing the crew of the French *Bison*, and, being the nearest

ship to the German air bases, was subjected to a series of heavy attacks.

With her speed falling off, and with a fierce fire raging amidships, the *Afridi* swung round, but her crew continued to fight her guns, even when the after end of the ship was under water. Finally she sank, but fortunately Captain Vian and more than 100 of her gallant company were saved.

Afridi, *Grom*, and *Bison*. They constituted a heavy price, but not one ship in the convoy had been lost. The Navy has never counted the cost when the safety of troops entrusted to its care has been at stake.

There had been five main air attacks on the convoy that day. The German aircraft had aimed more than 200 bombs at the transports, but their aim had every time been spoilt by the barrage put up by the escorting destroyers. The attacks during which H.M.S. *Afridi* was hit were the first recorded instance of Stuka dive-bombers being used by the Germans against a warship.

In October, 1940, Captain Vian was again in action against the enemy off the Norwegian coast. The *Cossack* had by this time been repaired and was back in service, and Captain Vian was on her bridge again. With him he had the other Tribal class destroyers *Sikh*, *Ashanti* and *Maori*.

This force was at sea in the northern part of the North Sea when, on the evening of October 13th, a reconnaissance aircraft reported that an enemy convoy, escorted by warships, was moving off the Norwegian coast. Captain Vian at once led his destroyers at high speed to intercept.

At midnight, when the British destroyers were about four miles off the coast in the neighbourhood of Egersund, they sighted the convoy. It was about three miles inshore of them and thus only about a mile from the coast.

Vian led in to the attack, reducing speed so that the white bow and stern waves of his destroyers should not give him away. He achieved complete surprise. Amazing as it seems, the British destroyers got within 3000 yards of the convoy before the Germans, who had been sighted by Vian at a distance of 6000 yards, saw them.

So far as could be ascertained, the convoy consisted of one big supply ship of about 7000 tons and two supply ships of about 5000 tons. It was guarded by two German escort vessels.

As the Germans sighted Vian's force, they challenged. Their

challenge was met by a devastating fire from the British destroyers. Almost at once the 7000-ton supply ship blew up and sank. The German escort vessels were quick to reply to the British fire, but one of them was immediately heavily hit. She ceased firing and sank, her bow sticking out of the water for some minutes before she completely disappeared. The other German escort vessel thereupon attempted to escape under cover of smoke.

Meanwhile one of the 5000-ton ships had been hit and set on fire. She burnt fiercely for a short time and blew up with a tremendous explosion. The other 5000-ton ship was engaged at very close range and sunk by gunfire. Almost at the same instant the remaining German escort vessel was caught by the British guns on the edge of the smoke screen into which she was trying to escape. She was stopped by a salvo, and she also was sunk by gunfire.

The whole action took only a very few minutes. It was fought within a mile of a hostile coast and resulted in the destruction of every enemy ship seen. It is probable that the whole German convoy and its escorts were annihilated. Captain Vian's force had one man wounded.

When the great German battleship *Bismarck* broke out into the Atlantic in May, 1941, Captain Vian, still in the *Cossack*, was covering the passage of a convoy more than 1500 miles south of Greenland. He had with him the other "Tribal" class destroyers, *Zulu*, *Maori*, and *Sikh*, and the Polish destroyer *Piorun*. For some time it seemed that these destroyers would have no part in the rounding up and destruction of the *Bismarck*. Nevertheless, Vian held himself and his ships in readiness.

On the morning of May 26th, Vian's destroyers were steering to the north-eastward to rendezvous with the Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Tovey, whose flag flew in H.M.S. *King George V*. Vian had been ordered to turn his destroyers on to this course by the Admiralty, where it was appreciated that Admiral Tovey would by this time be short of screening destroyers owing to the comparatively low fuel endurance of this class of ship at the speed of the chase.

At eleven o'clock that morning Captain Vian received the report that the *Bismarck* had been sighted by a Catalina flying boat of the Royal Air Force Coastal Command. Acting on his own initiative, he turned his destroyers on to a course to intercept the *Bismarck*. In so doing he was disregarding his orders to steer to rendezvous with

the Commander-in-Chief. He could not ask for further orders or expect any from the Commander-in-Chief, owing to the necessity for maintaining wireless "silence." Captain Vian's action was, however, a correct interpretation of the Commander-in-Chief's wishes in the altered circumstances.

Vian's ships made contact with the *Bismarck* at 10.45 p.m. on May 26th—a few hours after the German ship had been crippled, so far as her steering and high speed steaming capabilities were concerned, by naval aircraft from H.M.S. *Ark Royal*. They made something akin to a cordon round the *Bismarck*, thus ensuring that she should not slip away unnoticed, and giving the destroyers opportunities to attack with torpedoes from several different directions.

The main object of the operations of Vian's destroyers that night was to keep in contact with the *Bismarck* and deliver her safely to the Commander-in-Chief in the morning. This was no easy matter. The weather was very heavy, so that the destroyers could work only at low speeds, and the visibility was frequently reduced to a few yards by heavy and prolonged rain squalls. The thick weather, of course, added to the importance of the destroyers' task of keeping in close touch with the German ship.

Shadowing operations of this sort had been frequently practised in peace, and it was a tribute to the peace-time training of the Royal Navy that so difficult an operation proved possible under war conditions in the very bad weather prevailing.

Although keeping the *Bismarck* under close and constant observation was the main task of Captain Vian's destroyers, the ships took their opportunities of delivering independent torpedo attacks.

Between 1.20 and 1.50 a.m. on the morning of May 27th, Vian's Tribal class destroyers attacked the *Bismarck* with torpedoes.

It was no sinecure, this baiting of the great German battleship. The destroyers, dashing in to attack as opportunity offered, realised that the most powerful battleship in the world was still very much a force to be reckoned with, albeit she could not steer accurately and could steam at only 12 knots. The gunfire which these attacks provoked was both heavy and accurate. In the event, only the *Zulu* suffered superficial damage and some casualties from splinters of shells bursting close, but she was not the only destroyer to have a narrow escape. The destroyers went in, closing the range until they saw the flash of the *Bismarck's* guns as she opened fire on

them. Then they turned, firing their torpedoes, and withdrew on a zigzag course through the splashes of the falling salvoes.

The Admiralty's assessment of these attacks was that the *Cossack* and the *Maori* each hit with one torpedo. After the *Maori's* attack fire was seen to break out luridly upon the *Bismarck's* forecastle, but this seemed to be soon extinguished. At all events the German battleship, so far from being able to break away, was brought to a standstill for more than an hour, while the Commander-in-Chief hurried to the kill. But the Commander-in-Chief was warned by Captain Vian that the *Bismarck*, although virtually immobilised, was still capable of an unpleasantly heavy and accurate fire.

While Vian's Tribal class destroyers were attacking, the Polish destroyer *Piorun* had remained in the offing. During the approach she had received the full benefit of the *Bismarck's* gunfire, but had spat back defiance from her little 4.7-inch guns for several minutes before taking refuge behind a smoke screen. As a result, the *Piorun* lost contact with the *Bismarck* and did not attack at the same time as the other destroyers.

The *Piorun's* captain would undoubtedly have attacked the *Bismarck* single-handed on making contact again at daylight, although he must have been sunk in so doing. Captain Vian, however, saw no reason why, with the battlefleet expected at any moment, the gallant Polish destroyer should be allowed to sacrifice herself. Moreover, the *Piorun* might run dangerously short of fuel if she were not sent back to a fuelling base without further ado. Captain Vian was forced, therefore, to disappoint the *Piorun* and order her to steer for the nearest British base.

The exchange of signals between Captain Vian and the Commanding Officer of the *Piorun* on this occasion are a monument to the efficiency and keenness of the co-operation of the British and Polish navies.

Three months later, Vian, now a Rear-Admiral, was again spoiling German plans in the Arctic.

The occasion was a combined operation against Spitzbergen, which took place in August, 1941.

Spitzbergen is rich in coal, and it was thought that this would be used by Germany for the fish-oil factories of Norway (which supply Germany with valuable ingredients for explosives), for the transport of men and supplies to the Murmansk front, and for carriage of the high-grade iron-ore from Narvik to the German

munition factories. It had therefore been decided to destroy the mines and stocks of coal, and to take off the miners, who would thus have been deprived of their livelihood. The miners were Russians and Norwegians. The Russians were to be taken to Archangel and the Norwegians to England.

Rear-Admiral Vian was in command of the naval forces taking part. On August 25th he arrived with the whole force at Spitzbergen. Canadian troops under the command of Brigadier A. E. Potts were landed to carry out the demolitions, round up the inhabitants, and take charge generally of the operations ashore.

The first thing to be done was to seize the wireless station before it could report to Germany what was taking place. This was successfully accomplished. The chief duty of the wireless station was sending routine weather reports to Germany. This it continued to do throughout the twenty-four hours that the British force was at Spitzbergen, but it was operated by British signalmen. The weather at Spitzbergen was clear, but the wireless station told Germany that it lay under thick fog, thus discouraging the approach of any German long-range reconnaissance aircraft. When the demolition was complete the wireless station was also destroyed, and while the British force was steaming away across the Greenland Sea it heard Germany frantically calling Spitzbergen by wireless, demanding to know why it had closed down.

The Spitzbergen raid was a great success. All the machinery of the mines was destroyed; 450,000 tons of stacked coal and 270,000 gallons of fuel oil, petrol and grease were burnt. A number of Norwegian merchant ships, with their crews and cargoes, and smaller vessels, were liberated and restored to King Haakon's Government.

In the first week in September, 1941, Rear-Admiral Vian scored yet another notable success in the Arctic.

It was clear that our assistance to our Russian allies could be both direct and indirect; direct by the supply of war materials, and indirect through interference with the enemy's supplies to his front in North Russia. These enemy supplies were taken by sea, for roads and railways were non-existent.

It had been known for some little time that the enemy's sea communications with Kirkenes and Petsamo, the two Arctic ports supplying the enemy armies on the North Russian front, had been

increased. The problem was to deal with them. Some of our submarines operating in the Arctic had done wonders, but the traffic went on, and along most of the coast of Norway the ships could travel within the offshore islands in a channel virtually inaccessible to our surface forces. There was one place in the far north where the enemy convoys had to cross open water—from the North Cape eastwards across the entrances to the Porsanger, Laks, Tona, and Varanger Fiords.

It was here that Rear-Admiral Vian struck on September 8th. Carrying out a sweep to the east of the North Cape, he fell in with a German force which was covering the passage of a convoy across the entrance to one of the fiords. He at once attacked, and there followed an action which scattered the enemy convoy, inflicted serious loss upon the German Navy, and threw into confusion the whole of the German sea communications in the far north.

The weather was vile. There was little sea-room in the fiord. The visibility was low and so variable that, even now, it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of exactly what happened. First there was a warning shout of "Alarm port." Guns and range-finders swung round on to the alarm bearing. Then a German destroyer appeared out of a patch of mist at a range of only about 150 yards. Before she could fire a shot, she was being raked by pom-pom shells at almost point-blank range. Then the British 6-inch guns came into action. A broadside carried away most of the bridge and superstructure of the German destroyer. There was an explosion, and her shattered hulk lay stopped and listing, settling down rapidly. At that moment the mist and smoke settled down, hiding the remains of the German ship from view.

Vian did not wait, he altered course and circled through the smoke and mist in search of the ship which had caused the initial alarm. Suddenly there was a terrific crash. Rear-Admiral Vian's flagship, H.M.S. *Nigeria* (commanded by Captain D. L. Dundas, R.N.), had rammed the damaged hulk of the destroyer. The collision almost certainly finished the German destroyer, but it also damaged the bows of the *Nigeria*, though it did not impair her fighting efficiency.

A few moments later the *Nigeria* was out of the smoke. A most confused action was taking place, with the German ships not knowing which way to turn to avoid the British force. The *Nigeria's* consort, H.M.S. *Aurora* (commanded by Captain W. G.

Agnew, R.N.) was hotly engaged and obviously inflicting great damage on the enemy.

Suddenly the *Nigeria* sighted the *Bremse*, used by the German Navy in peace time as a gunnery training cruiser, and now acting as a fleet light cruiser, and engaged her. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion in the *Bremse* and she sank in a matter of seconds. It seems probable that she was hit by a German torpedo which had been aimed at the *Nigeria*.

Meanwhile, another German ship came in sight at very close range. A broadside from the *Nigeria* hit her aft, another left her but a smoking hulk, which slowly heeled over and sank.

The next target was a German armed trawler. Of her, too, the *Nigeria's* guns made short work. Then the weather cleared suddenly, revealing another German destroyer about 6000 yards away. She opened fire and the British guns replied. In a few moments spurts of flame and patches of glowing red showed where the British shells were hitting. The German destroyer was hit by at least seven shells. What happened to her is not known, as the weather shut down again and hid her. In that short period of better visibility, however, other British units had scored hits on at least two other ships.

The damage to the bows of H.M.S. *Nigeria* had, however, radically altered the situation. At the best of times it is a very tricky business for cruisers to engage destroyers in the narrow waters of a fiord and in low visibility, and the damage to the *Nigeria's* bows reduced her speed and made her more difficult to handle. Moreover, daylight was approaching, and Vian had to think of extricating his force and getting away, first to the northward to clear the land, and then to the westward. A northerly gale was blowing and his flagship's speed was reduced by a material but unknown amount, and the north coast of Norway was studded with enemy airfields.

Vian accordingly withdrew. His force had fought a brilliant action under very difficult conditions. The enemy had been taken by surprise and thrown into confusion. Heavy losses had been inflicted upon him. In Vian's force there was not one casualty, and the only material hurt was to the bows of the *Nigeria* from ramming the remains of the German destroyer. Philip Vian, however, was not satisfied. The German Navy had certainly suffered, but two supply ships which were known to have comprised the convoy had escaped. They had not even been seen.



Rear-Admiral Sir Philip L. Vian

The damaged bows of the *Nigeria* caused some anxiety on the long voyage home, as it blew a full gale for days on end. The ship, however, reached port safely, was repaired, and has since seen further service against the enemy.

Having most effectively scourged the German Navy on many occasions in the far north, Rear-Admiral Vian went to the Mediterranean, and it was not long before he was scourging the Italian Fleet.

On Sunday, March 22nd, 1942, Rear-Admiral Vian fought an action against the Italian Navy which was afterwards described by the captain of one of the ships which took part as: "One of the most brilliant actions against greatly superior forces ever successfully brought off."

The action arose out of the running of an important convoy from Alexandria to Malta. The essence of success in an operation of this sort is that the enemy should know nothing of what is going on until the convoy has been delivered at its destination. From the outset this seemed impossible of achievement, for the enemy had extensive air reconnaissance from Libya and Crete as well as from Southern Italy. The weather, however, was bad when the convoy left Alexandria, and continued to deteriorate. Rear-Admiral Vian was thus entitled to hope that the convoy might be run through to Malta without being seen and reported by enemy reconnaissance aircraft.

• That hope might have been realised, but he had a stroke of bad luck. At dusk on Saturday, March 21st, five German transport aircraft passed over the convoy. They were on passage, and it was purely fortuitous that they should have passed over and sighted the convoy. But they did, and, of course, they reported it.

The result was a series of air attacks which commenced at 8.45 on Sunday morning. These initial air attacks were carried out by Italian torpedo-carrying aircraft, and they achieved no result from a prodigious expenditure of torpedoes.

A more serious danger to the convoy was, however, developing. The report from those transport aircraft gave the Italian Fleet at Taranto ample time to put to sea to intercept the convoy and its light covering force. Vian realised this, but he was without definite knowledge of whether the Italian ships had sailed or not, for the weather still precluded reliable reconnaissance from the air.

At 2.25 p.m. on Sunday, March 22nd, when the convoy and its

covering force were due south of Italy, four enemy ships were sighted to starboard. No longer was there room to doubt that the Italian Navy proposed to intervene.

Rear-Admiral Vian's flag was flying in the 6000-ton cruiser H.M.S. *Cleopatra* (Captain G. Grantham, C.B., D.S.O., R.N.). Vian's real flagship, H.M.S. *Naiad*, had been sunk under him the week before. Shortly after Vian had been picked up from the water by a destroyer an elderly sailor brought him a glass of rum with the words: "I've just been to the captain to get his authority to draw this rum for you, sir. I looked after you last time you were sunk, in the *Afridi*, and I remembered that this is what you asked for."

The most powerful ships in Vian's force were light cruisers of the *Cleopatra* class. He also had with him a few destroyers, while the close escort of the convoy consisted of an anti-aircraft cruiser and some escort destroyers. The largest British guns were therefore the 5.25-inch, and the four Italian ships were soon identified as cruisers, each one of them of superior gun-power to the *Cleopatra*.

There were still six hours of daylight, during which the enemy had to be held off the convoy. Rear-Admiral Vian could not reinforce his squadron from the convoy escorts, as these were urgently needed to repel incessant air attacks and be ready for any new threat which might develop.

Vian acted quickly. He ordered the convoy to turn away to the southward, while he and his destroyers turned towards the enemy, laying as he did so a thick curtain of heavy black funnel smoke between the enemy and the convoy.

Vian's ships were, of course, outranged by the heavier metal of the enemy, and they soon came under fire. He held on, however, steering straight for the enemy, with every funnel of his force belching a screen of black smoke. Then, as the *Cleopatra's* guns came within range, her helm went over and she opened rapid fire. The destroyers followed her example. The moment the Italian guns seemed to be getting the range the British ships doubled back into the smoke screen which they had laid. A few moments later they dashed out of the smoke, fired a few salvos at the enemy, and dodged back into the smoke before the enemy had collected his wits and got his gunnery control in hand.

So it went on for an hour and a half. Vian's *Cleopatra* and her small consorts surprising and confusing a superior enemy by their

very daring. The Italians dared not close the smoke for fear of torpedo attack from our destroyers, and the rapidity of Vian's dashes into the open gave their guns no chance. The Italian cruisers stood it for ninety minutes. Then they decided that they had had enough, and withdrew. And all this time the convoy was forging steadily ahead towards Malta.

That was only the first phase of this amazing action. Soon after 4.30 on that Sunday afternoon more enemy ships were sighted. This time the enemy force consisted of one Littorio class battleship, mounting 15-inch guns, two heavy cruisers mounting 8-inch guns, four cruisers mounting 6-inch guns, and several destroyers. Rear-Admiral Vian had, of course, received no reinforcements. The odds against him in weight of metal were akin to those against Sir Richard Grenville in the fight of "the one and the fifty-three." A single shell from that Italian battleship would have knocked out any one of Vian's ships.

Vian repeated the tactics which had proved so effective earlier in the day against the Italian cruisers. Instead of retiring before this overwhelming force he flashed the signal, "Turn towards the enemy."

Standing motionless on the bridge of the *Cleopatra*, Vian watched every move of the Italian Fleet and of his own small force. He thought that, with good handling, his ships might—under the good providence of God and against all the laws of probability—have the measure of the enemy. He had seen, only an hour or two ago, the enemy's reluctance to accept the risk of torpedo attack, and this he determined to exploit to the utmost.

Again the British ships laid dense clouds of funnel smoke. Again they dashed in and out of the smoke, each time carrying the edge of the smoke screen a little nearer the enemy, and each time spitting defiance—and, to start with little else—at him from their guns. Thus the range was shortened. 15,000 yards—10,000 yards—gigantic splashes from 15-inch shells fell round the British ships, but they never gave the Italians a chance to correct their aim. Time and again Italian salvos fell where a British ship would have been, had it not dodged into the smoke and immediately put the helm hard over.

At last Vian thought the range had closed enough for him to carry the fight to the enemy. He ordered the destroyers in to attack with torpedoes. At the same time the *Cleopatra* dashed out of the

smoke, confusing the aim of the Italians and pumping shells at them.

The results of this bold action were little short of amazing. The Italian battleship was hit amidships by a torpedo, and a salvo from the *Cleopatra* landed on her quarter-deck and started a fire. One of the enemy cruisers was badly hit and seriously damaged. Another suffered hits, the results of which could not be seen.

Of Vian's force, the flagship was hit on the bridge, and three destroyers suffered some damage, but the immensely superior Italian fleet had had enough. It drew off and did not again try to interfere with the passage of the convoy. Apart from incessant air attacks, which took on almost the character of a desperate attempt by the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica to save the face of the Italian Navy, the convoy forged on to Malta without further let or hindrance.

Rear-Admiral Vian is the last man in the world to "throw bars of chocolate about," as the naval vernacular has it. Yet, he made the following signal to all concerned:

"By your endeavours and those of our forces at Malta, the Italian fleet failed to make contact with the convoy, nor did the Axis air forces damage any ship in it until off Malta. No ship in our fleet has suffered from the air attack, which is attributable to your gunnery and dexterity. Above all, Malta has received stores vital to the island's defence."

It will be noted that Rear-Admiral Vian thought more of the work of the ships in convoy and of the close escort in fighting off some 200 aircraft without loss to the convoy or escorts, although without air support, than the work of his covering force in beating back an immensely superior enemy fleet.

The Admiralty, with characteristic but graphic understatement, said: "These operations, in which our light forces under the command of Rear-Admiral Vian, fought off and severely damaged a greatly superior enemy, and repulsed continual heavy air attacks, constitute a notable achievement."

The King sent a personal message of congratulations to Rear-Admiral Vian and created him a K.B.E.

Vian did not rest on his laurels—now a K.B.E., a D.S.O. and two bars. In August he was at it again, exploiting surprise and carrying the war to the enemy. This time it was in a bombardment of Rhodes, the great Axis base in the Dodecanese—the nearest enemy

air base to Cyprus, the oil pipe line terminus at Haifa, Alexandria and the Suez Canal.

In August, 1943, it was announced that Philip Vian was one of the inshore naval commanders responsible for the conduct of the Allied landings in Sicily and the close support of the Anglo-American troops during that victorious campaign. It seems that Vian is to be found wherever successful offensive action is taken.

Philip Louis Vian comes of an old Huguenot family. He is tall and fair, with brown hair, and possessed of a pair of very blue and very piercing eyes, which shelter under eyebrows which can only be described as "beetling." He is lean and looks trained to a hair, as, in fact, he is. In peace-time his hobby is ski-ing. In a way he is almost forbidding, by reason of his silences—he has far more of them than Colonel Bramble, and they are more eloquent than those of André Maurois's hero! He is a great man because he is a man of one idea—to beat the enemy.

SIR WILLIAM FREDERICK WAKE-WALKER

K.C.B., C.B.E.

Vice-Admiral in His Majesty's Fleet

THE CONTROLLER of the Royal Navy is also the Third Sea Lord. Even in peace-time it is a post of great responsibility, for the Controller is the member of the Board of Admiralty whose job it is to see that the officers and men of the fleet get the ships and weapons they want. This responsibility he must, of course, discharge within the limits of the money voted by Parliament as the "Navy Estimates," and in accordance with the lines of policy laid down by the Cabinet and interpreted into terms of "tons and guns" by the Naval Staff. When one considers that the agreed peace-time "life" of a capital ship was twenty-six years, one realises the extent to which the Controller has to build for the future.

In war-time the Controller's task is much heavier. All sorts of new developments and new types of ships are required, and their production has to be decided in such a way as to avoid interference with other forms of essential war production. The Naval Staff evolve programmes of the ships they desire. Then it is the task of the Controller of the Navy to investigate the production and manpower resources available and tell the Naval Staff what they can have. The result is, of course, in some sense a compromise. This leads to the framing of the building programme, which is approved by the Cabinet. Then Parliament is asked for its sanction—in war-time on the basis of passing a "token vote"—for it is essential that the details of the Navy Estimates be kept secret in time of war.

The Controller of the Navy at the present time is Vice-Admiral Sir William Wake-Walker. He took over that post in May, 1942. In this war his job is colossal. He is not himself responsible for the building and repairs of merchant ships, though the Admiralty is; and a nice balance has to be kept between the requirements of the Fighting Navy and the Merchant Navy. As an instance, one may cite the controversy over fast and slow cargo ships. It is obvious on the face of it, that the fast ship is preferable to the slow ship, but all manner of other considerations have to be taken into account.

Concentration upon the building of fast merchant ships would have created a bottleneck in marine engine building, and this in turn would have slowed down the production of fast escort vessels, so that, when the fast merchant ships were completed they would have had either to steam slowly or do without escort protection.

It must be remembered, too, that in war one does not have only the ordinary naval building programmes as in peace-time. Superimposed upon these are all manner of special requirements, designed as replies to specific threats posed by the enemy, or to carry out some particular offensive.

Modern war is one of rapid development, with the balance between the resources of the attack and of the defence swaying one way and another until the decisive stage is reached.

The escort craft required in the Atlantic are a case in point. The older and slower corvettes, which were built in large numbers and which robbed the U-boats of their initial advantage on the trade routes, were perfectly fitted to deal with U-boats carrying out submerged attacks. When the U-boats, however, began attacking on the surface at night and using their high surface speed to escape, the slow corvettes were quite inadequate. The result was the development and production of the fast corvette, which is now known as the frigate, and which is contributing so effectively to the defeat of the U-boats.

There is also a tremendous amount of conversion and repair work which has to be dovetailed into the shipbuilding programmes. The fitting of all ships with "degaussing" as a protection against magnetic mines, the provision of special minesweepers to deal with magnetic and acoustic mines, the production of defensive equipment for merchant ships, all these things and many more have to be taken into consideration.

The extent of the Admiralty's relations with the shipbuilding and ship-repairing industry is shown by a statement of results broadcast to the United States of America by Vice-Admiral Wake-Walker on September 17th, 1941. He pointed out that:

"Fast patrol boats have been built all over the world from parts produced in Britain. Merchant ships have been launched from British yards in three months and completed in four, and the cost is half what it would be in the United States. Nearly half the ship-building labour of this country is employed on repair work. More than 23,000 warship repairs and refits have been needed, while

140,000,000 gross tons of merchant shipping, or 35,000 vessels, have been put back into service. Because of the cramped nature of the building slips on the Tyne and Clyde, and the inability through insufficient time and labour to lay out new shipyards elsewhere, we have had to build in the yards we had. Yet, in spite of this, the blackout and the 'blitz,' the achievement has been one to marvel at."

It must be remembered that these statements were made in September, 1941.

As the war progressed many new duties have fallen upon the Controller of the Navy. He has had to see that that portion of Lease-lend, and "Lease-lend in reverse" which affects naval ships and equipment does not overlap; and that the best possible use is made of warship building and repairing facilities, not only on both sides of the Atlantic, but also in the Dominions and Colonies all over the world. The march of the United Nations from the defensive to the offensive has also involved more responsibilities for the Controller, for he has to arrange for the production of all the various types of assault and landing craft required for amphibious warfare, and see that the provision of these vessels does not cut across other vital work.

To discharge all these many duties without interfering with other factors in the national war-effort, and to inspire confidence rather than provoke controversy, the Controller of the Navy must be a master of constructive compromise and an ambassador of industry, interpreting the needs of the Navy to the workers, ship-builders and repairers.

In eighteen months as Controller, Vice-Admiral Wake-Walker has shown himself the possessor of these qualities. For obvious reasons, the results of his labours remain very secret until they are fully developed and used against the enemy, but there is no doubt that when the full history of the war can be written, the successes scored by the Controller's department and in the shipyards and factories will be accounted among the greatest victories of the war.

William Frederick Wake-Walker was born on March 24th, 1888, at Watford, but his home is now at East Bridport in Norfolk. He comes of a famous naval family with a long tradition of service. His grandfather commanded the Turkish Navy during the Turkish-Egyptian war just over a century ago, and was afterwards Con-

troller of the Royal Navy for thirteen years. The name of Admiral Sir Baldwin Walker, K.C.B., figures on the roll of former Controllers which hangs in the room in the Admiralty where his grandson now works.

Wake-Walker entered the Royal Navy as a cadet in January, 1903, and as a Lieutenant he specialised in torpedo work. Specialisation in torpedo work does not mean dealing only with torpedoes and methods of torpedo attack; mine warfare is also his province, and the torpedo officer is responsible for the whole electrical installation of his ship, from dynamos to telephones and fire-control circuits.

Wake-Walker was promoted to Flag rank on January 10th, 1939—thirty-six years, all but five days, after he had joined H.M.S. *Britannia* as a cadet.

On the 9th September, 1939, Wake-Walker was appointed in Command of the Twelfth Cruiser Squadron forming part of the Northern Patrol in the Atlantic and hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *Effingham*, but on 28th October he was recalled to the Admiralty to take charge of the planning and preparation of large-scale mining operations which were intended to close the North Sea and protect our East Coast traffic routes. This involved the formation of a Minelaying Squadron, production of mines, provision of bases and all the other arrangements necessary for extensive mining. He arrived at the Admiralty at the time when the situation as a result of the German magnetic mine was becoming acute. The answer to this was not in sight, although various methods were being investigated, and on 22nd November he was made responsible for dealing with this problem, in addition to continuing the planning of our own mining operations.

The situation was serious; ships were being sunk all round our coasts, and the possibility that the Thames might be completely blocked was always present. The day after he took over this job, the Germans kindly planted a magnetic mine on the shore. This, of course, greatly facilitated the problem; it is always much easier to prepare an antidote when one knows the exact construction and capabilities of the weapon, and these were soon discovered, thanks to the great courage of those who risked their lives in dismantling the mine. Although the answer to the magnetic mine was theoretically very simple, involving the application of certain elementary electrical principles, knowledge of exactly how the mine worked

saved a great deal of time and experiment—and time was vital, for ships were being sunk at a serious rate.

Though the principles were simple and did not involve a great deal of scientific research and discovery, the difficulties in devising and producing the practical application of these principles in the form of sweeps and protection were considerable.

The protection developed was to demagnetise the ships—the process came to be known as “degaussing.” At first the scientists considered this impracticable, but it was done, and as soon as the method had been developed the task of getting it applied was turned over to Vice-Admiral Lane-Poole. Under his charge the work went on with such rapidity that by June, 1940, all our warships and merchant ships in Home Waters had been completed.

The provision of sweeps to destroy the mines presented many difficult practical problems, and when these were got over the sweeps had to be produced in the numbers required, ships had to be fitted with them and men trained in their use.

It was done, however. Hitler’s “secret weapon” had been defeated, as had a very serious threat to our vital sea traffic. The store set by the Germans on the magnetic mine is shown by an incident which occurred on board the German “pocket battleship,” *Admiral Graf Spee*, which was scuttled off Montevideo after the Battle of the River Plate.

When it was announced over the radio that we had found an answer to the magnetic mine, the captain of the *Admiral Graf Spee* exclaimed to a British merchant ship captain, who was held prisoner on board: “It is impossible! It took eight years to develop, and there is no answer to it.”

It was an anxious period of intense activity, but by May, 1940, Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was able to turn over the job to one of the regular Admiralty Departments with the knowledge that Hitler’s secret weapon had been met and mastered.

By that time, too, the preparations for our great mining operations were nearing completion, and Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was due to go to sea in June in command of the Minelaying Squadron. Before this happened, however, he was needed for another desperately urgent task.

On his return to the Admiralty after lunch on Wednesday, May 29th, 1940, Wake-Walker was told that Vice-Admiral Tom Phillips, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, wanted to see him. The British

Expeditionary Force in Belgium was falling back on Dunkirk and the neighbouring beaches. About 70,000 men had already been got away, but great efforts would be needed to get off more than a very few more. Wake-Walker was required to go and take charge afloat, marshalling all available ships and boats and distributing them between the beaches so as to save the maximum number of men.

By six o'clock that evening Wake-Walker was in Dover and in consultation with Vice-Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay. Information of conditions at Dunkirk was scanty, but it was known that, of the three channels leading to Dunkirk the eastern one was unusable as a destroyer had been sunk in it, the western one was under German shellfire, and the centre one was none too easy for navigational reasons.

At 8 p.m. Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker sailed in the destroyer *Esk*, with Commodores Stevenson and Hallett, who were in charge of beaches.

It was dark when the *Esk* approached Dunkirk. From a long way off the flames from burning oil tanks and a black pall of smoke over the town could be seen. There was also a blazing merchant ship offshore. This proved to be the *Clan Macallister*. She, and another deserted merchant ship played a most useful part, for the Germans bombed them incessantly instead of selecting other more important targets.

The *Esk* visited the beaches in turn, landing beach parties in her boats, and it was not until 4 a.m. on Thursday, May 30th, that they found the minesweeper *Hebe*, in which ship was Captain Bush, who had up till then been in charge offshore. Wake-Walker transferred to the *Hebe*, and moved eastward up the coast. Dawn found them off La Panne, and Wake-Walker was able for the first time to see the situation and get some idea of the task ahead. At the water's edge was a dark line of men, and there were large groups of men all over the beaches. Off Braye, H.M.S. *Bideford* was ashore with her stern completely blown off by a bomb. The river gunboat *Locust* was trying to tow her off (she eventually succeeded and got her back to England). Farther down towards Dunkirk another ship was high and dry and burnt out on the beach. Lying off the beaches were destroyers, sloops, drifters, and other craft, and men were making their way off to these in whalers, motor boats and pontoon craft. There was a slight swell, many boats

were broached-to on the beaches, and embarkation was desperately slow.

Wake-Walker wrote afterwards: "To any one with an appreciation of the practical difficulties of embarking in small boats with a long pull to seaward, the sight of that beach black with troops was dismaying. The numbers increased steadily as more men filed down the sand-dunes, and at the back of our minds all the time was the question and fear of how long the defence line could hold and the weather remain fair."

By 7.30 a.m. most of the ships had loaded up and were leaving. Wake-Walker asked urgently for more ships, and particularly for more boats. Then he went down to Dunkirk in the *Hebe*. The position in the harbour was not easy owing to the strong tides and the wrecks of ships which had been sunk alongside the jetties. While Wake-Walker was ashore at the Naval Headquarters, the *Hebe* filled up with six to seven hundred men, some of them wounded. There were large numbers of men waiting to be embarked in Dunkirk, where embarkation from the jetties would be much faster than on the beaches, but Dunkirk harbour seemed to be little in use. Wake-Walker discovered that this was due to a hasty judgment of the situation during a heavy bombing attack in which the destroyer *Grenade* had been sunk and several others hit alongside the piers. As a result, embarkation was being almost confined to the beaches. From that time onwards, Wake-Walker did his utmost to see that the fullest possible use was made of Dunkirk, the only place where large numbers of men could be quickly embarked.

From Dunkirk Wake-Walker went back to La Panne, and then sent H.M.S. *Hebe* back to Dover with her load of men. At La Panne he met Commodore Stevenson, who had seen Lord Gort. Lord Gort said he wished to see Wake-Walker. Embarkation from the beaches was still proceeding slowly, but conditions were deteriorating. Wake-Walker transferred his staff to the destroyer *Windsor* while he went back to Dunkirk in *M.T.B. 102* with the intention of driving from there to Lord Gort's headquarters. At Dunkirk he discovered that the drive to Lord Gort's headquarters would take longer than he cared to be away, so he decided to go back to La Panne and land there by boat. *M.T.B. 102* had insufficient fuel to go to La Panne and then return to Dover, so he boarded H.M.S. *Gossamer*, took her up to La Panne, and then transferred to the destroyer *Worcester*.

There were air attacks on the ships off La Panne about midday and again late in the afternoon. At 8 p.m. Wake-Walker started inshore in the *Worcester's* whaler to see Lord Gort. He got wet through in landing, but eventually reached G.H.Q., where he found Lord Gort. Wake-Walker wrote afterwards that Lord Gort "was charming and seemed very cheerful and unperturbed and glad to see me. He had been told that a Rear-Admiral was being sent to take charge of the embarkation and made me feel that that simple fact should have a great effect. I must confess I did not feel so confident of what it was possible for me to do. . . . I shall not easily forget that meal. For one thing my trousers and seat were very wet, and it seemed so strange to be sitting there looking out across the beach to the sea."

The intention at that time was for the rearguard to withdraw at midnight the following night and fall back on the beaches. Lord Gort was very anxious that this rearguard—5000 of his best troops, should be got away. Wake-Walker had stated: "I must confess I felt daunted at the prospect and the seeming impossibility of the task. Apart from the rearguard there were tens of thousands of others to come off beforehand, and the thought of that rearguard falling back in the dark and being embarked with an enemy active in pursuit raised unpleasant pictures."

Wake-Walker arranged with Lord Gort that the latter should embark from La Panne at 6 p.m. next day, or go to Dunkirk if embarkation from the beach was impossible. Then he returned to the *Worcester*, and put Commodore Stevenson in charge of the arrangements for embarking Lord Gort and his staff. Once again Wake-Walker got wet through, and he borrowed an old pair of grey flannel trousers and a pair of dirty white gym shoes from the captain of the *Worcester*. He remained in the *Worcester* until she was full of troops, about 1 a.m. on May 31st, and then sent her back to Dover, transferring to the destroyer *Express*.

In Wake-Walker's words: "By this time I had been off the beaches for twenty-four hours and they had seemed very full ones. I don't know when I slept, though I have a recollection of lying down in the *Hebe* for an hour, and of trying to sleep sitting down on the bridge of the *Express*, leaning against some instruments with very sharp corners."

At 7.30 that morning Wake-Walker transferred to the *Keith*, which was detailed as his flagship, and sent the *Express*, now fully

loaded, back to Dover. The *Keith* hoisted a Rear-Admiral's flag—up to that time Wake-Walker had shown which ship he was in by hoisting a Red Ensign. That morning there was an onshore wind which made embarkation from the beaches even slower and more difficult. It still went on, but Wake-Walker signalled to the shore urging a movement of the troops towards Dunkirk as it was becoming more and more obvious that large-scale embarkation could only be expected at that port.

At 10 a.m. the *Hebe* returned, with the news that large numbers of boats were being sent over in tow of tugs and all manner of vessels. These were the little craft of the great volunteer armada from the English coast and the River Thames.

Wake-Walker sent the *Hebe* to La Panne with orders to embark Lord Gort and his staff at 6 p.m., but early in the afternoon the *Hebe* reported that she had been shelled off that beach and had to move westward. An hour later Wake-Walker took the *Keith* to La Panne to see if it were possible to shell the German guns from the sea, but the battery could not be seen and fairly heavy shells fell close to the *Keith*, so that she, too, had to move out of range. Owing to the shelling he urged Lord Gort to embark at once, but he would not leave before the time arranged.

The *Keith* then went to Dunkirk, with a terrific air battle going on above her as she steamed along, keeping as close as possible to the edges of the channels in the hope of avoiding the large number of mines which had been dropped by the enemy. This mining was continued throughout the evacuation, and as there was no chance of being able to sweep them, sole reliance had to be put on the "degaussing" gear of the ships. This reliance was not misplaced, and there is no doubt that no large-scale evacuation from the Dunkirk area would have been possible if "degaussing" had not by that time been fitted to practically all ships as a protection against magnetic mines. Moreover, the Navy's losses would have been far more serious.

"It was always impossible for me to do more than deal with the situation of the moment." "It was not possible to see any way ahead." "When I was off La Panne I could not watch the other end of the line." "I wanted to be in several places at once." Those phrases from Wake-Walker's narrative show more vividly than any description the difficulties with which he had to contend.

Shortly before 6 p.m., as the *Keith* was approaching La Panne,

the *Hebe*, who had been sent there to embark Lord Gort and his staff, signalled to Wake-Walker. "General on beach abreast you." The *Keith* at once stopped and sent in boats to where there was a group at the water's edge with two cars. These were the Headquarters Staff and were duly embarked in the *Keith*, although a heavy air attack developed in the process. One plane tried to bomb the boats and they had a miraculous escape. It was with some surprise that Wake-Walker learnt that Lord Gort was not in this party but was already on board the *Hebe*, which was embarking troops.

At this time there was a great increase in the air attacks on the ships and the beaches and in the shelling of the ships. The destroyer *Vivacious* reported that she had been twice hit.

That afternoon Wake-Walker issued instructions for supporting fire against enemy tanks and lorries which were likely to appear on the beach soon after the line was evacuated. (The rearguard was to fall back at midnight). La Panne was likely to be the critical place and he intended to be there himself in the *Keith* at daylight. He also kept the destroyer *Basilisk* free of troops so that she could go into action.

After embarking the Headquarters Staff, Wake-Walker went back to Dunkirk to see how things were going there. Then "I saw for the first time that strange procession of craft of all kinds that has become famous—tugs towing dinghies, lifeboats, and all manner of pulling boats—small motor yachts, motor launches, drifters, Dutch scoots, Thames barges, fishing boats, pleasure steamers." Wake-Walker spent several hours seeing that this collection of craft was distributed to the best advantage about the beaches. Then, after dark, he returned to La Panne. Shelling was by this time almost continuous, many aircraft were dropping mines, and the sound of E-boat engines to seaward did nothing to ease Wake-Walker's anxiety.

As it began to grow light at about 3.30 a.m. on June 1st, Wake-Walker looked anxiously towards the shore. It was soon clear that La Panne beach was no longer tenable. Men were moving westward along the beaches and ships were still loading off Braye. At 4 a.m. it was misty, with low clouds, but unfortunately these conditions did not last.

As the *Keith* had only about thirty rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition left, Wake-Walker decided to transfer to the *Basilisk*

and sent the *Keith* into Dunkirk to fill up with troops and return to Dover. Before he could do so, however, a heavy bombing attack developed, first around Dunkirk, where the destroyer *Ivanhoe* was hit and the minesweeper *Havant* sunk. Not long afterwards a compact formation of thirty or forty JU 87's appeared. The gunfire of the ships seemed effective and Wake-Walker thought it was driving them away, so he seized the opportunity to leave the bridge for a moment. As he was returning he felt the ship increase speed and heel over under helm. He reached the wheel-house to find everybody lying down and the quartermaster steering by the lower spokes of the wheel. A moment later there were three loud explosions and the ship shook and heaved as if she had been hit. By that time Wake-Walker was back on the bridge. Three dive-bombers had attacked. One bomb burst ten yards astern and the others had missed close by.

In a few minutes three more Stukas attacked. Wake-Walker saw the bombs released and watched them coming. Everybody on the bridge was lying down or crouching, but there was only room for Wake-Walker, who is a very tall man, to bend a bit. "It was an odd sensation," he said afterwards, "waiting for the explosions and knowing that you could do nothing. When they came it was obvious that the ship had been hit. She shook badly and there was a rush of smoke and steam coming from somewhere aft." Wake-Walker went aft to investigate. There was smoke and steam coming from the after funnel, but he could see no damage. The bomb had actually gone down the funnel and burst in the boiler room.

As the *Keith* could not steam and had anchored, Wake-Walker transferred to *M.T.B. 102*, which came alongside shortly afterwards. He had intended to transfer to the *Basilisk*, but she had been sunk, as had also the minesweeper *Skipjack*.

In *M.T.B. 102* Wake-Walker left for Dunkirk, providing amusement for several dive-bombers on the way, which bombed and machine-gunned the M.T.B. but without effect. As he left, Wake-Walker saw the *Keith* hit again, this time just below the bridge on the port side. When he last saw her she had a heavy list, but her anti-aircraft gun was still in action.

The *Keith* was hit twice more and eventually sunk. Her company were taken off in a tug which also had survivors from the *Basilisk* and *Skipjack* on board. Unfortunately this tug was then



Vice-Admiral Sir W. F. Wake-Walker

sunk, and the German airman then bombed and machine-gunned the men in the water.

Wake-Walker reached Dunkirk about 9.15 a.m., and went ashore to try to see General Alexander, who was in command now that Lord Gort had left. He was away, however, but a staff officer told him that it was intended to continue the evacuation during that night from Dunkirk and the western beaches.

As, at that time, all the ships had either left fully loaded or been sunk, Wake-Walker decided to visit Vice-Admiral Ramsay at Dover and give him a first-hand account of the situation at Dunkirk and on the beaches. He reached Dover at 11.30 a.m. despite more bombing and machine-gun attacks on the way.

Wake-Walker had a quick lunch, a sleep until 3.30 p.m., and then went down to the office to discuss the plans for the night. It had already been decided that further evacuation could only take place at night. A large collection of small craft were to embark troops from the beach immediately east of Dunkirk, while large cross-channel steamers were to use Dunkirk itself. They could carry as many as 3000 men, and so were very valuable, but they were large targets and the need to use them increased the anxiety.

At 5 p.m. Wake-Walker left Dover in *M.A.S.B. 10* (M.A.S.B.s were motor anti-submarine boats). This time his flag consisted of a piece of cleaning cloth painted with red paint. It had been hastily made on board. At 7 p.m. he arrived at Dunkirk and went ashore to the naval headquarters. There he found Captain Tennant, the Senior Naval Officer, who wore a tin hat decorated with the letters S.N.O. cut out of silver paper and stuck on with sardine oil, and General Alexander. Wake-Walker made arrangements to pick up some of the naval parties at two o'clock next morning, but Captain Tennant said he would not go then. He said to Wake-Walker, "To-morrow we'll either be back in London, in a German prison, or done for."

As it got dark Wake-Walker went out to meet the first of the ships coming in, and for the whole of that night he was occupied in shepherding ships here and there so that they would be in the best position to do the most good at any given moment.

At two o'clock on the morning of June 2nd Wake-Walker went alongside the end of the pier to embark the naval parties. They were not there, but an officer sent ashore to find them returned to say they were on their way. Wake-Walker finally got them on

board at 2.45 a.m. Even at that early hour it was showing signs of getting light, and as it promised to be a very clear morning Wake-Walker reluctantly decided to get the ships away at 3 a.m. instead of 3.30 a.m. There was no sense in risking ships being sunk alongside and blocking the pier and harbour.

Wake-Walker accordingly ordered the ships to leave and followed them out of harbour. It seems apt here to quote again from his personal narrative. "This bare recital of events," he wrote, "gives little idea of the conditions and background against which they took place. To me there were two contrasting aspects—darkness looking out to seaward, and landward dark silhouettes showing against the steady glow of fires and the occasional flash of bombs. To seaward lay the ships, visible as dark blurs only, waiting off the harbour entrance for their turn to come in to the piers, looming up large and distinct as they drew near. Looking shoreward, the whole town and harbour were shut in by a pall of smoke overhead, which was lit up by the glare of fires in several places inland. Against the glare the piers, harbours and town were sharply silhouetted, and on the piers and quays an endless line of helmeted men in serried ranks, sometimes moving, sometimes stationary. The funnels and masts of ships showed clear as they lay alongside or went in and out of harbour, their hulls hidden or dark and invisible. There was not a great amount of noise; sirens hooted occasionally when ships moved; shells burst with sharp cracks, distant bombs crashed; machine-gun fire was faintly heard, and nearby at times when some one fired at a plane overhead; engines throbbing as a destroyer moved past; occasional orders and hailing of boats."

In the early hours of June 2nd, *M.A.S.B. 10*, with Wake-Walker on board, went back to Dover, the night's work at Dunkirk done.

In Dover Wake-Walker snatched a couple of hours on a bed. Then a bath, breakfast, and a discussion on the plans for the next night. The withdrawal of the British Expeditionary Force had surpassed the most sanguine expectations, but there were still 5000 of them to be taken off, and an unknown number of French troops, thought to be between 30,000 and 40,000. In order that the fullest possible use should be made of the Dunkirk piers a programme was worked out for cross-channel steamers, destroyers, minesweepers, and sloops to arrive in the various berths in Dunkirk at half-hourly intervals. There were a large number of wounded at Dunkirk, and

it was decided to send two clearly marked hospital ships by daylight in the hope that the Germans would respect them. They didn't. One was bombed and sunk and the other so badly damaged that she had to return.

In the late afternoon Wake-Walker went back to Dunkirk in *M.A.S.B. 10*. At about 8.30 p.m. Wake-Walker picked up General Alexander and his staff. Then he transferred to a destroyer. Captain Tennant went off in an *M.T.B.* after the last of the British troops had left.

Despite the fact that the last British troops were successfully taken off, and that the night was remarkable for magnificent feats of seamanship under very difficult conditions of wind and tide, it was disheartening. For some reason the flow of French troops to the east pier stopped for some hours. One ship lay there for three and a half hours waiting for men.

Again Wake-Walker ordered the ships to leave at 3 a.m., and he waited to see the last of them go. Then he watched the blockships go in, accompanied by *M.T.B.s* to take off their crews. Then he returned again to Dover, thinking that all evacuation from Dunkirk was ended. There he learnt, however, that a final attempt to get French troops away was to be made the next night—that of June 3rd. The project seemed all right, but Commanding Officers and crews were at the limit of their endurance, and Vice-Admiral Ramsay did not feel that he could order ships to go under the circumstances. He therefore asked by signal what ships would be ready and able to go. As a result, ten transports, six destroyers, twelve minesweepers, two corvettes, two yachts, a gunboat, ten drifters, five scoots and one tug became available, together with a large number of boats and small craft. British seamen were not going to see the French Army surrender if they could help it.

Again Wake-Walker went over to Dunkirk in the afternoon, this time in *M.T.B. 102*. He arrived about 8 p.m. and soon found his hands full marshalling the ships and large numbers of French small craft. As a result of these craft and the tide, there was a hold-up at the pier which led to congestion of shipping outside the harbour. There were many other problems to contend with, but the ships were got away before daylight with at least 30,000 men. Fortunately the return to Dover was masked by fog. Dunkirk was over. Where it had been hoped to save 20,000 or 30,000 men, in fact 335,000 French and British troops were saved.

heavy that the *Bremse* had been working as a cruiser flagship in the Arctic.

While the attacks were successful, they were costly. Sixteen of the naval aircraft did not regain the carriers. This was largely due to the element of surprise having been lost by the sudden change in the weather and the appearance of the German reconnaissance aircraft, which had warned the defences. As a result, the slow and laden Swordfish had to attack through enemy fighter patrols and very heavy barrages. Later news, however, showed the cost to have been less than had at first been feared. The crew of one Swordfish had reached Russian territory and was repatriated to Britain, and nineteen other members of the crews of lost aircraft had made safe landings and were prisoners of war.

It is impossible during the war to assess the full results of this attack, but the fact that it was followed by some slackening of the German pressure on the Russian Murmansk and Kandalashka fronts can hardly have been coincidental. Britain had for the first time used her sea-power to assist her great military Ally in the east.

Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was also responsible for flying the first Royal Air Force Hurricane fighters in to North Russia.

For nearly ten months after the attack on Petsamo and Kirkenes the ships of the First Cruiser Squadron carried on their manifold and arduous duties in obscurity. Then the German battleship *Bismarck* broke out, and for thirty-two desperately anxious hours the hopes of the whole free world were centred upon Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker and two of his cruisers—H.M.S. *Norfolk* and H.M.S. *Suffolk*. In those thirty-two hours Wake-Walker and his men made history and performed a feat which even the text-books of cruiser work would hardly have deemed possible.

On the evening of May 19th, the new German battleship *Bismarck*, the pride of the German Navy, had left Kiel Bay, accompanied by the new 8-inch gun cruiser *Prinz Eugen* and a number of destroyers. The German squadron had been reported passing northward through the Kattegat, and early in the afternoon of May 21st the two large German warships had been located in one of the fiords near Bergen by a reconnaissance aircraft of the Royal Air Force. Then the weather had deteriorated, and further reconnaissances had proved abortive. It was not until the afternoon of May 22nd that a desperate attempt at reconnaissance by a naval aircraft had established that the *Bismarck* and her consort had left

the fiord near Bergen. Advanced units posted in the northern part of the North Sea had seen nothing. The *Bismarck* and the *Prince Eugen* seemed to have disappeared.

There were several courses open to the enemy, but it seemed most probable that the two ships would try to reach the Atlantic trade routes, where two vessels of their power might be able to do untold harm before being rounded up. Even so, there were three main routes by which the Germans might try to reach the open Atlantic—the passage between the Shetland and Faroe Islands, the passage between the Faroe Islands and Iceland, and the Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland.

Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was in the Denmark Strait. His flag flew in the cruiser *Norfolk*, and he had with him the cruiser *Suffolk*. Upon these two cruisers devolved the responsibility for ensuring that the *Bismarck* and the *Prinz Eugen* did not slip through the Denmark Strait unobserved.

In the fourth week of May the main Greenland icepack left a channel of ice-free water about sixty miles wide between the Icelandic coast and the edge of the icepack. It is a part of the world where fogs and storms alternate with one another, and the visibility can seldom be relied upon.

On the afternoon of Friday, May 23rd, 1941, the atmospheric conditions in the Denmark Strait were unusual and peculiar. Over the icepack the atmosphere was clear, and this weather extended over the water for about ten miles to seaward of the edge of the ice. The whole of the rest of the Denmark Strait, right across to the Icelandic coast, was shrouded in dense mist. Thus there was a channel of clear water and clear weather ten miles wide running along the edge of the ice, with ice on its north-westward side and fog and mist on its south-eastward side.

During the later afternoon the *Suffolk* was searching to the north-eastward along the edge of the icepack, while Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker in the *Norfolk* was patrolling in the mist farther to the south-east. The *Suffolk* was taking full advantage of the peculiar conditions, and keeping close to the edge of the mist while she searched the clear strip between her and the ice edge. This she did so as to be able to take cover in the mist at once if she suddenly met the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* at close range, for the task of the cruisers was to locate, report and shadow the enemy, and in no sense to risk an action which could only result in the loss or damage

of one or both the British cruisers and the escape of the enemy into the Atlantic.

The *Suffolk* had searched the clear water and clear weather channel as far as the northern approaches to the Denmark Strait, and had just turned back to the south-westward, when Able Seaman A. R. Newell, the starboard after lookout, sighted the *Bismarck*, with the *Prinz Eugen* following astern of her. It was then 7.22 p.m.

The German ships were skirting the ice edge, so that they were on the *Suffolk's* starboard quarter when sighted. They were steaming south-west at high speed.

Captain H. M. Ellis, R.N., of the *Suffolk*, had to act instantaneously in order to avoid being engaged at short range by the *Bismarck's* 15-inch guns. He put the helm over and increased to full speed, and the cruiser swung away to the south-eastward and into the mist. At the same time, the signal that the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* had at last been located was sent out.

Having located the enemy ships, the first duty of Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker's cruisers was to get into positions from which they could shadow the enemy and report his movements. That is easily written, but it was most difficult to carry out. The ships to be shadowed had so great an advantage in armament that either or both the shadowing cruisers might easily be put out of action if they got too close. Yet in the varying visibility to remain a long way off was to run great risk of losing touch, for the *Bismarck* was certainly not slower—and probably faster—than the cruisers. Moreover, the sea-room was limited by the icepack and the fog banks. Add to this the fact that the *Bismarck* had with her a powerful cruiser, with the same armament but better protection than either of the British ships, which might at any time be used to drive off the shadowers.

The difficulties and dangers of shadowing so powerful a ship in uncertain and suddenly varying visibility were very soon demonstrated. While the *Suffolk* was trying to work round in the mist into a shadowing position on the port quarter of the enemy, the *Norfolk* was coming up to the north-eastwards at 30 knots to assist in the shadowing.

During this time Wake-Walker on the bridge of the *Norfolk* kept on thinking that he heard distant gunfire. He was afraid that the *Suffolk* was being heavily engaged and might be knocked out. His anxiety had a personal element, for one of his sons was serving

in the *Suffolk*. (Another son was in the *Sheffield*, which was detached from "Force H" to shadow the *Bismarck* in the closing stages, so the *Bismarck* operation was quite a family affair for the Wake-Walkers.) It was not for some time that what had been thought to be the sound of distant gunfire was discovered to be in fact the banging of the armoured door of the chart-house below the *Norfolk's* bridge.

At 8.30 p.m. the *Norfolk* suddenly came out of the fog to find herself face to face with the *Bismarck* at a range of only six miles, which was shortening very rapidly as the ships were on opposite courses and approaching one another at high speed.

It was a dangerous moment for Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker and the *Norfolk*. The *Norfolk's* captain—Captain A. J. L. Phillips, R.N.—at once put her helm hard over and made smoke to cover her withdrawal, but even as the cruiser turned, the *Bismarck* opened fire with her 15-inch guns. The big shells fell close, and some splinters from them came inboard, but the *Norfolk* regained the shelter of the mist without being hit or sustaining casualties.

Almost at the same moment, the *Suffolk* emerged momentarily from the mist—just long enough for Captain Ellis to check the enemy's position and course, realise that the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* were now steaming 28 knots, and assure himself that they were too close to the edge of the ice to be able to break back to the north-eastwards by a turn away to starboard.

Naturally, air co-operation from Iceland was immediately sought, but the weather conditions were all against effective air co-operation in those high and stormy latitudes, and aircraft which took off to locate and shadow the enemy in the Denmark Strait were forced to return to their bases having sighted nothing. Wake-Walker's cruisers, however, hung on to the enemy in spite of all difficulties.

Shadowing was supremely difficult. There is practically no night in those far northern latitudes at the end of May. The visibility was variable and untrustworthy. At one moment the *Bismarck* could be clearly seen at a range of eighteen miles, and then, within a few minutes, it would be impossible to see even one mile. There were rain storms, snow squalls and ice floes with which to contend. The light was tricky in the extreme, and sometimes produced mirage effects which made it impossible for a man to believe his own eyes.

Shortly before 10 p.m., for instance, the *Suffolk* saw the *Bismarck*

altering course to starboard on the edge of a rain storm. A few seconds later, those on the bridge of the *Suffolk* caught a momentary glimpse of her. She appeared to have turned completely round and be steering straight for the *Suffolk*. There was no doubt in the mind of any one on the bridge of the *Suffolk* that the *Bismarck* had turned, so the cruiser turned to the north-eastward to shadow the enemy from ahead. But four minutes went by and the *Bismarck* had still not emerged from the rain storm, as she must have done had she really turned to the north-east. In fact, the *Bismarck* had never turned to the north-east, but had resumed her south-westerly course, and the glimpse of her which had deceived those on the *Suffolk's* bridge had been a mirage effect.

Soon after midnight another mirage effect deceived the shadowing cruisers. The *Bismarck* was seen to make what appeared to be an alteration of course to starboard, and the shadowers acted accordingly. It was not for several minutes that the alteration in the bearing of the enemy from the British cruisers proved that the *Bismarck* had turned, not to starboard, but to port.

By 5 a.m. on May 24th, the *Bismarck* and her consort had emerged from the Denmark Strait. Wake-Walker's cruisers were still at her heels reporting her every movement and her position from time to time. Outside the strait, however, the *Bismarck* had more sea-room. She could steam at high speed for a considerable time in any direction, and she began to make large and frequent alterations of course of about 30 degrees and again increased speed. These manœuvres were obviously an attempt to throw off the shadowers, but Wake-Walker's cruisers hung on doggedly and continued to shadow and report the enemy's every movement.

The meeting between the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* and H.M.S. *Hood* and H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* under Vice-Admiral L. E. Holland was now imminent. For nine and a half hours Wake-Walker's cruisers had shadowed the enemy over 250 miles under the worst possible conditions, and were in the act of delivering him to our heavy ships. One can imagine Wake-Walker's relief when he sighted the smoke of the *Hood* and *Prince of Wales* on his port bow and knew that action would be joined in a few minutes and that his long and difficult task had apparently been brought to a successful conclusion. His relief was short-lived.

There followed tragedy. In a brief engagement the battle-cruiser *Hood* blew up and was lost with her Admiral and all but three of

her company, and the new battleship *Prince of Wales* was damaged. Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker again found himself the senior officer on the spot, with his two faithful cruisers the only undamaged units in touch with the enemy. The fate of countless ships on the Atlantic trade routes, and possibly even the outcome of the war, once again rested upon him.

Although the *Bismarck* had been hit in the action, her damage did not affect her fighting efficiency, and led to only a small reduction in her speed. This was not known to Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker, who was uncomfortably aware that the Commander-in-Chief with the main fleet was still some 450 miles away to the south-eastward, and well out of the track of the German ships if they continued, as they showed every sign of doing, to steam south-west, still at fairly high speed.

In this most difficult situation, Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker had two alternatives. He could either engage the enemy with his whole force, including the battleship *Prince of Wales*, whose damage was not serious, although part of her main armament was out of action, or continue to shadow the enemy and hope that by so doing he would facilitate the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* being eventually brought to action by a force of sufficient strength to ensure their destruction. The former alternative was, at best, a desperate gamble. He might inflict damage on the enemy which would materially reduce his speed. He might even effect the enemy's destruction, but he had seen enough of the power of the *Bismarck* to regard this as highly problematical. He accordingly accepted the other alternative of continuing to shadow. In so doing he realised that he was better off than he had been in the Denmark Strait, for he could keep the *Prince of Wales* with him as support, which would at least ensure that he could not be driven off unless the enemy sought action, in which case he was prepared to accept it. Events were to show that Wake-Walker's decision was the correct one.

The morning of May 24th had been fine and clear, but later in the day the weather began again to deteriorate and the visibility to become variable, changing rapidly on occasions from two to seventeen miles. This made the task of shadowing the enemy both difficult and dangerous. Moreover, the German Admiral Lutjens was determined to exploit the weather conditions and continually attempted to elude the persistent shadowers by large and frequent alterations of course and speed.

To make matters worse, Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was by no means convinced that the *Bismarck* had, in fact, sustained damage which prevented her from attaining her maximum speed. He had, to be sure, received a brief report from a Sunderland flying boat, which merely said "losing oil," but this he had taken as referring, not to the *Bismarck*, but to an unfortunate personal ailment of the flying boat.

Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker's cruisers, supported by the *Prince of Wales*, hung in doggedly to the heels of the enemy, although touch was lost for a few minutes on several occasions during the afternoon, when a drizzle set in and the visibility grew rapidly worse. In these conditions aircraft could be of no real assistance, however hard they tried. During the afternoon the *Bismarck* suddenly gave up her large and frequent alterations of course, set a course to the southward, and reduced speed still further—to about 24 knots. It appeared as if Admiral Lutjens had given up hope of being able to shake off his shadows by daylight.

Late that Saturday afternoon Wake-Walker decided to engage the enemy in the hope of being able to delay his southward progress. There was also the possibility that he might be able to draw the *Bismarck* to the eastward—towards the Commander-in-Chief. To this end he determined to engage from the enemy's port quarter and then retire to the eastward, hoping that the *Bismarck* would follow in order to try finally to drive off the persistent shadowing force.

The visibility was low at the time, and this favoured Wake-Walker's plan. The German Admiral, however, had a plan of his own for using the low visibility. This was to trap the *Suffolk*, who was shadowing on his starboard quarter. The German plan might have succeeded had not the *Suffolk* already begun to change her position to fit in with Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker's plan. Even so, the *Suffolk* came under heavy fire from the *Bismarck*, but was able to escape undamaged under cover of smoke.

Wake-Walker at once ordered the *Norfolk* and *Prince of Wales* to support of the *Suffolk*, and six minutes later the *Prince of Wales* opened fire at long range, but the *Bismarck* at once turned away, refusing action.

It was then seven o'clock in the evening, and after this inconclusive engagement Wake-Walker resumed his shadowing tactics.

At 11.30 that Saturday night, when it was still broad daylight,

the torpedo striking force from the aircraft carrier *Victorious* sighted a surface ship through a gap in the clouds and identified her as the *Bismarck*. While the aircraft were manœuvring to attack, however, the weather shut down and the *Bismarck* was lost to sight. They found the *Norfolk*, however, and Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was able to tell them the position of the enemy.

At this critical moment a strange ship appeared on the scene—she was afterwards identified as a United States coastguard cutter. The sudden appearance of this strange ship confused both the aircraft and the shadowing cruisers. The former broke cloud cover over her instead of over the *Bismarck*, so that they had to carry out their attacks on the German battleship through a terrific barrage from that ship; while the cruisers very nearly opened fire on the strange ship, thinking for a moment in the low visibility that it was the *Bismarck*, who had made a large alteration of course.

Tragedy was averted, however. The aircraft attacked the *Bismarck* with great gallantry and scored one torpedo hit; this led to a substantial, though only temporary, reduction in her speed.

An hour later Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker again tried to delay the *Bismarck's* southward progress by forcing action, but again the attempt was abortive. After exchanging two salvos at a range of eight miles the *Bismarck* turned away and broke off the engagement. It was abundantly clear that Admiral Lutjens had no intention of allowing the *Bismarck* to be brought to action, and that further attempts to do so would almost certainly result in forcing the *Bismarck* farther to the westward—away from the Commander-in-Chief. In these circumstances Wake-Walker had no alternative but to abandon thought of action and to content himself with shadowing the enemy.

At six minutes past three on the morning of Sunday, May 25th, Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker experienced the bitterest moment of his life. At that time, after having shadowed the *Bismarck* successfully in face of innumerable dangers and difficulties for thirty-one and three-quarter hours and over a distance of nearly 1000 miles, he was forced to admit that his shadowing force had lost touch with the enemy. It had been the longest and most arduous shadowing feat in history. It was an epic of cruiser work. But that was cold comfort with the *Bismarck* lost.

A number of causes contributed to touch being lost—the dark-

ness, and the variable visibility being the chief. We now know that the German Admiral had taken advantage of a period of low visibility to make a large alteration of course to the westward. He increased speed at the same time and so broke away. Then he worked round through north to east and so out under the sterns of the ships which had dogged him for so long.

So the chase of the *Bismarck* became a hunt, and in that hunt Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker played no inconsiderable part, although the sectors which he was detailed to search proved empty of the enemy.

The *Bismarck* was sighted again at 10.30 a.m. on Monday, May 26th, by a Catalina flying boat of the R.A.F. Coastal Command. She had then been lost for nearly thirty-one and a half hours—a time of extreme strain and anxiety for all who were in command at sea. Naval aircraft from H.M.S. *Ark Royal* soon afterwards made contact, and that evening, despite atrocious weather, the *Bismarck* was so damaged by torpedo attacks launched by the *Ark Royal's* aircraft that her speed was seriously reduced and she was unable to steer. That night she was held at bay by Captain Vian's destroyers, and delivered by them to the Commander-in-Chief on the morning of Tuesday, May 27th.

By that time H.M.S. *Norfolk*, wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker, had arrived on the scene. Wake-Walker's flagship was, in fact, the only ship to take part in the whole of the chase of the *Bismarck*, from the time of her first being sighted in the Denmark Strait on the evening of May 23rd to her eventual destruction west of the Bay of Biscay on the forenoon of May 27th. During the whole of that time Wake-Walker had never for a moment "let up."

On the morning of May 27th Wake-Walker on the bridge of the *Norfolk* sighted a large ship. This he thought was the British battleship *Rodney*, and the *Norfolk* actually began signalling by lamp to this ship before it was realised that she was, in fact, the *Bismarck*. As soon as the mistake was realised the *Norfolk* withdrew and, keeping in touch with the *Bismarck*, made contact with the Commander-in-Chief in H.M.S. *King George V*.

Thus it was the *Norfolk* which provided the first visual link between the Commander-in-Chief and his quarry, and when action was joined at 8.47 a.m. Wake-Walker took the *Norfolk* out to the flank to spot the fall of shot for the battleships *King George V*. and

Rodney. Then, by 8.55 a.m., the *Norfolk* was herself in action with the *Bismarck*.

Battered into inaction by the guns of the British battleships, the *Bismarck* was sunk by torpedoes from the cruiser *Dorsetshire*. So ended one of the longest and most widespread of naval operations, and one which the Prime Minister described as: "this fierce and memorable naval encounter."

In October the *London Gazette* announced that Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker had been awarded a C.B.E. "for distinguished services in the masterly and determined action in which the German battleship *Bismarck* was destroyed." He was made a K.C.B. in the New Year's Honours, 1943.

THE END

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